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The aviator's wife

AN AVIATOR'S WIFE

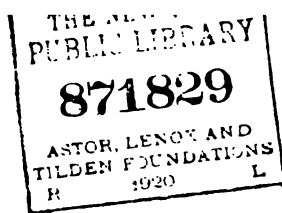
BY
ADELAIDE OVINGTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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**VAIL-BALLOU COMPANY
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**TO
MY STILL-FLYING
HUSBAND**

Dodd, M. V.



FOREWORD

This book may read like fiction, but it is not. The first five months of my married life were spent among the hangars of New York, Chicago, Boston, and Columbus. I recorded events as they happened, before my impressions had time to cool. Then I put the manuscript away and became interested in babies.

Now that aviation is coming into its own, and the children are big enough to go to school, I have brought the manuscript from its hiding place and put it in shape for publication.

It is true that men are flying higher and farther and faster than when Ovie flew his ticklish monoplane. But this is largely because the engines are more reliable and the airplanes more stable. They are designed with some thought for the safety of the aviator. Nowadays, they duplicate all important control wires so that if one breaks the other may be relied upon. And the wires themselves, instead of being solid, are cables. In the early days of exhibition flying—the period covered by this

FOREWORD

book—a single wire no larger than the lead in a pencil was used to operate the elevator and rudder. Its breaking meant certain death.

The modern biplane is so stable that the hands may be removed from the controls for minutes at a time. In fact, with some of the battle-planes used in the Great War, the aviator locked his controlling levers so as to have his hands free to operate the machine gun. With the exhibition monoplanes, such as the Bleriot, a constant and precise movement of the control levers was necessary to keep the horizon where it belonged. And the aviator paid with his life for a single mistake.

In the old days, the exhibition flyer who went “upstairs” always knew that he would come down again—somehow. His shortest flight was full of thrills. The aviator’s wife, even though she stayed on earth, got nearly as many thrills as her husband, and no two of them were quite alike.

A. O.

Of all the aviators who flew in 1911 Earle L. Ovington is the *only* one flying to-day.

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AN AVIATOR'S WIFE

AN AVIATOR'S WIFE

CHAPTER I

THE BIRDMAN

IF a certain Irishman, whose name I have forgotten, had not kicked the steward under the table I might never have met Earle Ovington.

The steward was about to seat me at another table. I wondered why he suddenly changed his mind, and put me at one where there were no other women. I was rather appalled at the array of masculinity before me. The steward, taking pity on me, brought in another girl, who, I was pleased to see, looked even more scared than I was.

The dignified Captain presided at our table. Besides him there was a white-haired Englishman, a jolly individual known as the Senator, the gay young Irishman whose kick was responsible for my being there, and — an empty chair. I did hope some nice, motherly old lady would be seated in that chair to even things up, but my hopes were never realized.

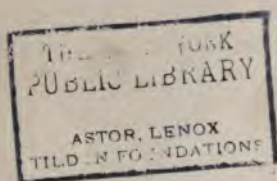
Instead, HE came. Never shall I forget that first glimpse we had of him. My impression was of a big man all eyebrows; they nearly met above his nose and were so thick and black they dominated his whole face. Later I noticed that he had grey eyes which usually seemed to be brooding over some abstract problem. I felt instantly that he was different from the others. At the time I laid it to his unconventional dinner garb of Norfolk coat and knickers. That goes to show how little I knew. Still, I was not altogether to blame for thinking his distinction a matter of clothes, for I can't remember that he said a single word during the whole meal.

He left before the rest of us had finished, and we all fell to wondering who he could be. The passenger list was noncommittal. With the aid of the steward, however, and by a process of elimination, we discovered that his name was Earle Ovington. But that left us none the wiser.

Efforts to draw him out proved useless. He seemed to be utterly engrossed in a big book he was always reading, and kept absolutely to himself, tucked up in his steamer chair behind the ponderous volume. I fancied that even when he was not reading his thoughts were on its pages.



My first *impression* was of a big man all eyebrows



Wrapped in a greenish, leather-lined coat, with a woollen cap pulled down over his heavy brows, nothing on earth seemed to matter to him but that everlasting book.

So far as girls were concerned he was easily the most indifferent man on board. To be sure, he always bowed when he met us on deck, but that was as far as it went. He never offered to join us.

Every day he took a walk—and such a walk! With long, swinging strides, his feet moving three times as fast as anybody else's, he covered mile after mile at the same unbroken speed. It was easy to see that he was athletic.

Betty, my table companion, reported that she had seen him suddenly disappear into the wireless booth. He remained there for hours. When he came out he was, if possible, deeper in thought than usual. I was surprised to learn that he could be interested in anything besides his book. But, Betty said, he soon relapsed into his chair again and resumed his reading.

The next day Earle Ovington showed signs of being interested in something else. We discovered him stretched out in his deck chair in the stern of the boat watching the sea gulls. For hours he scarcely changed his position, gaz-

ing at them with a rapt attention as though fascinated by their graceful movements.

It was at dinner the third night out that I heard him speak for the first time.

"Captain, can you tell us," asked the elderly Englishman, "where the gulls that are following this boat get the energy which drives them forward and even upward without the movement of a wing?"

"That," replied the Captain pompously, "is one of the unrevealed secrets of Nature."

"Unrevealed *NOTHING!*"

We all turned in amazement. The Sphinx had broken silence.

"The explanation is perfectly simple. They are using the internal energy of the wind and of the air currents which always follow a moving steamer. All these gulls do is to take advantage of the warm air which rises from the boat and so follow along without expending their own energy. Don't you *see?*" he asked, swinging around upon us, his grey eyes gleaming with enthusiasm. "The coal which is being burned down under the boilers not only furnishes energy to drive this big ship through the water but it also furnishes energy for these gulls. The coal heats the air, the air rises, and

the birds coast down this warm air and so are able to follow us."

"But how does it happen," I asked, forgetting my shyness, "that the gulls soar upward?"

For the first time he seemed to be aware of my existence.

"Motion being only relative," he explained kindly, "it makes no difference whether the air is stationary and the bird is gliding down it, impelled by the force of gravity, or whether the bird is stationary and the air is rising and supporting it. In both cases the gulls are soaring on upward currents of hot air. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Oh, absolutely," I gasped, and the table roared.

Mr. Ovington joined in the laugh.

"That was pretty stiff," he acknowledged.

"But birds are my hobby."

"Ornithologist, are you?" asked the Senator.

"Only on the side," he answered carelessly.

"I'm chiefly interested in the way they fly."

"Don't they all fly alike?" asked Betty innocently.

Now even I could have told her better than that, but I was not prepared for the flood of information which greeted her.

"So far as their method of flying is concerned, there are two kinds of birds: first, those that flap their wings, and, secondly, those that hold them stationary—soar, as it is called. The flapping birds have short, thick wings and heavy bodies, and some of them, like ducks, fly very fast. In fact, the teal is the fastest flyer known, often attaining a speed of over two hundred miles an hour. Soaring birds, on the other hand, have long, thin wings. Their bodies are much lighter in proportion to their spread of wing than in the case of the flapping birds. The turkey buzzard is one of the best soarers. I have seen him drop out of the sky like a stone, then catch himself and soar up again without moving a wing. He simply takes advantage of the rising currents of warm air."

"Like the gulls," some one suggested, and he nodded.

"Great birds, those gulls," he burst forth enthusiastically. "Not a superfluous feather on them. They are built to weather the gales. Even their little feet are drawn up close beneath their bodies when they fly, because, small as they are, they would lessen the speed if they hung down."

"I take it they are natural flying machines then," said the Captain.

"Mechanically, no. So long as they are soaring they are gliders. They only become flying machines when they flap their wings. The early experimenters in aviation made thousands of flights in what they called 'gliders'—airplanes without engines. A lot of those fellows came to their finish that way, too," he brooded.

"I say, but you're up on the subject!" exclaimed the Englishman.

"Up in more ways than one," he assented, recovering himself with a laugh. "I'm an aviator."

So that was what made Earle Ovington so different! He had risen above the solid old earth to which most of us still clung so timorously. No wonder he hadn't more in common with his prosaic fellow travellers! We gazed at him with a new interest.

All that winter I had been in Paris studying. The weather had been atrocious, damp and chilly, with leaden skies. I had stood it until the middle of March, but still there was no hint of spring in the air. Then I realized with a pang that I was homesick, tired of the

city—tired even of Paris—and that I wanted to go home to Virginia. I hastily packed, took the first boat I could get for America, and now I was on my way. I shut my eyes and tried to imagine I was already there.

I could see the big maple at the gate beginning to turn red with the coming of spring, and the daffodils shining like slender flames in the grass. My faithful Great Dane, Hamlet, came bounding down the drive to meet me, and involuntarily I stiffened myself for the shock of the encounter. I never felt Hamlet was glad to see me unless he knocked me down. The lilacs round the house were just ready to burst into bloom, and little black Helen stood beaming in the doorway. It was all so real, and soon it would be more real still, for I would be there in time for Easter and the spring—or at least so I thought. As a matter of fact many things were to happen before I saw my old home again—and some of them began to happen right off.

When, on the fourth morning out, Earle Ovington halted before us and asked if he might put his chair near ours, Betty and I were so surprised that we had hardly breath enough to give a gasping consent. He explained that our part of the deck was more sheltered, but I think he

was tired of being alone. The instant his back was turned, Betty and I exchanged meaning glances. Here was our chance to see what an aviator was really like, to study at close quarters this unfamiliar creature of the skies. We tried not to seem too much interested as he dragged his chair to a place near ours. We might have spared ourselves the pains, though, for hardly was he settled before he hauled out his old book and began to read.

Betty had been having a flirtation with the Marconi man and he taught us both to tick off messages in the Continental code. Betty, whose awe of the aviator was less than mine, began tapping on the arm of her chair, and to my horror I realized that she was sending me a message about him.

"I call that nerve. If that's all he came for why didn't he stay away!"

I tapped back frantically, "Don't—he might understand."

"He doesn't understand anything but his book. What made him come?"

I was trying to think of what I could say to make her stop, hoping he hadn't noticed. Then the tapping was resumed, but this time with the quick, staccato touch of a professional.

"Lonesome," spelt the dots and dashes, and then again, "lonesome."

Betty looked at me and I looked at Betty. The aviator looked at his book. Then we all three laughed. So he knew the wireless code, too! Was there anything he didn't know?

Mr. Ovington closed his volume with a yawn.

"I suppose I do seem unsociable," he apologized, "but, you know, I've simply got to finish this book before I land."

"Is it about flying?" we asked in one breath.

He passed it to me, and Betty came to look over my shoulder. One glance at the title was enough for her, and with a sniff she went back to her chair, satisfied.

"Aerodnetics, by F. W. Lanchester," it read. I skimmed the table of contents: "Some Special Cases of the Phugoid Curve." "Stability of the *Hirundus Apus*."

"What kind of an animal is an '*Hirundus Apus*'?" I asked.

Before he could answer I was looking it up. All I found was a page spattered with higher mathematics, with a few cheery little sentences like this:

"The form of the curve of a given aerodrome will, if the aerofoil be made flexible after

the manner of the wings of a bird, undergo a change in the direction of resembling a phugoid of greater Hn value.' "

"Oh, it's a bird," Betty cried, relieved.

By this time the ice was broken and we began to feel acquainted.

"Do you know it's only by the merest accident that I happen to be here?" volunteered Mr. Ovington. "I had arranged to come back on one of the Cunarders but decided not to wait, and shifted over to the Minnetonka."

"Why, that was what I did too!" I confessed. "I had my passage engaged for two weeks later, and then—I changed it."

"What made you do that?" he asked, with quick interest.

"I don't know. Reckon I was homesick. I just wanted to, that was all."

"I don't know why I changed, either. There wasn't any special reason for it. Queer," he mused, settling back into his chair. "Darn queer." The rest of the morning he was silent and preoccupied as though trying to find a psychological reason for this coincidence.

I couldn't help thinking about it a little myself. What right had Fate to juggle my plans and make them fit in so exactly with his?

CHAPTER II

FINDING HIS WINGS

"IN bed," the aviator replied.

The table gasped.

"Evidently you didn't catch our question," the Captain stated with dignity. "Miss Alexander asked where you learned to fly."

"Exactly. And I answered 'in bed'. I learned to fly in bed," Mr. Ovington repeated quietly. "Every morning for fifteen minutes I sat up in bed with a pillow between my knees for a controlling lever. My feet rested on an imaginary steering bar connected by wires with the rudder. Sitting thus, I took many flights."

"A good safe way to fly," jeered the Irishman.

"More sensible than it sounds," the aviator retorted. "Believe me, there were some hair-raising side-slips and horrible deaths during those early flights. As time went on, however, I grew expert. The control of my imaginary craft became more and more subconscious. Soon I was making long flights at great altitudes! I flew over hundreds of miles of beauti-

ful imaginary country, through fleecy imaginary clouds, over bleak imaginary mountain ranges, without making a single mistake in the control of my machine."

"I guess it wasn't so easy when you tried the real thing," sneered the Irishman.

"Well, no, it wasn't. But the many flights I made between the sheets enabled me to handle a machine much more quickly when I finally tried it in the air. For instance, one evening I was circling the field and became so spell-bound gazing at the splendour of the setting sun that I forgot what I was doing. Before I realized that anything had happened, the earth was coming toward me at a dizzy pace. I had fallen into a bad side-slip. But the thing had happened to me so many times in bed that I knew just what to do to regain control. If I hadn't, sunsets upon this planet would have been a thing of the past for me."

"Where did you learn to fly—er—when you weren't in bed?" asked the Englishman.

They were all very much interested by now. Even the Irishman, I noticed, didn't miss anything that was said.

"I studied flying at Bleriot's school at Pau, a beautiful winter resort in the south of France.

It surely was an ideal place for aviation. A green field, level as a lawn, extended for miles in every direction, with the quaint little village of Pau on one side, and the snow-capped Pyrenees on the others. The weather was wonderful. Although it was January, we embryo birdmen used to lie around on the grass, without coats, waiting for our turn to fly."

"It strikes me," put in the Irishman, "that you did most of your flying in a recumbent position."

Mr. Ovington laughed good naturedly. "You mustn't get me started on aviation if you don't want me to talk."

"Oh, but we do!" we chorused. The Senator jumped in with the question:

"Why are there so few successful aviators?"

"Because flying is a subjective mental process. Expressed in more popular language, a good aviator flies instinctively. The subjective or subconscious mind—that portion over which we have so little control and which wanders around when we are asleep—works more efficiently in some people than in others. When its action is very rapid, it may be relied on in emergencies to a far greater extent than the sluggish objective part of our mental make-up. On

the other hand, the objective mind—that portion of my brain I am using now in talking—acts slowly and is liable to many errors. It can't be relied on in flying a man-made bird. The manipulation of an airplane is like walking a tight rope; the flyer is continually balancing himself upon the invisible currents of the air."

"I suppose that explains why so few aviators become really expert," the Senator observed.

"Why, yes. Leblanc, Bleriot's right hand man, told me that ninety per cent of his students should never have attempted to leave the ground; eight per cent would make fairly safe flyers under normal conditions; and the remaining two per cent were born flyers."

"So you think the born aviator is a man who flies subjectively?"

"Unquestionably. When the real emergency arrives he does the right thing at exactly the right time without having to think about it. Looking back upon his narrow escape, he wonders what made him act as he did. The made flyer, however, who relies on his objective mind, is pretty sure to do the wrong thing in a crisis, and gives the daily press a chance to add another name to its long list of the martyrs of the air."

With this final remark Mr. Ovington rose from the table. He patted the Irishman on the shoulder.

"All done, now," he said soothingly.

"Well, that wasn't so bad," grinned the Irishman.

Later, every one turned up on deck for an afternoon of sports. To our astonishment the aviator laid aside his book and took part in all the events. Even more to our astonishment, he won prize after prize—all, in fact, except the last one. By that time we were almost more surprised to see him lose. He and the Irishman were playing "Are you there, brother?" and he deliberately let his opponent knock him out. I don't know to this day whether he did it because he was ashamed to take any more prizes, or because of the kick which the son of Erin had given the steward.

We found afterward that the birdman had held the all-round championship in college for two years, so it wasn't strange that he was able to beat these business men at his own game.

That evening Mr. Ovington joined me on deck, while Betty was over at the rail studying the stars with the Irishman. Dropping into the chair beside me the aviator pulled out a

calabash pipe and asked if he might smoke.

"I reckon you don't know I'm a Virginian. I love the smell of good tobacco."

He filled his pipe. Then he produced a small, leather-covered book from his pocket and began turning its pages meditatively. "I don't know whether you'd care to see it," he said with a diffidence that sat oddly on him. "It's my diary."

"About Pau?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, mostly. It's nothing much but it may serve to make you laugh."

"Oh, do let me see it!" I cried, reaching out my hand. What a story I would have to tell Betty now!

"Wonder if there's light enough here for you to read."

"Oh, yes," I replied, opening the book at the first page.

"*Jan. 16th.* Usual fifteen minute flight in bed. Only killed once.

"I didn't mind last night when they put me in room thirteen at the Hotel de Londres, at Pau, but imagine my surprise to see 13 on the slip they asked me to sign when I registered at Bleriot's school. I'm going to prove that 13 is a lucky number for me.

"No trials today as too windy. Bleriot, Leblanc, Legagneux, and Morin all made flights. Was so impatient to fly I kept my eyes glued to the anemometer. Flying looks like great sport. Introduced American base-ball and it made a big hit. Leblanc, in his monoplane, plays with the Ville de Pau like a cat with a mouse."

"What was the 'Ville de Pau'?" I asked, looking up from the diary.

"A big dirigible balloon—a sort of baby Zeppelin. It used to pass over our heads three times a day with its fourteen passengers."

He began to smoke and I turned the page.

"*Jan. 17th.* Still too windy for students. Can make imaginary flights now with safety. Fellows laughed at me at first but after several of them had met with horrible deaths when they tried to imitate me I had them practising all over the field. More base-ball. I'll be fit to join the Nationals if this windy weather keeps up.

"*Jan. 18th.* First trip in Bleriot, twice the length of field 'grass-cutting.' These Anzani engines may not be good motors but they are great atomizers. The castor oil was dripping off my nose when I got back. Brown, one of

the students, tried to bore a thirty foot hole in the high fence around the aerodrome—and succeeded. That's his third smash. 'Dutchie' broke his leg and was taken to a hospital. He fell thirty feet and was thrown out when he hit the ground.

"*Jan. 19th.* Again too windy, according to old 'Wooden Shoes'."

"Who was 'Wooden Shoes'?" I looked up to enquire.

"One of our instructors, a short, square little man with a big temper. He usually wound a scarf round his neck as though he had the croup and stuck on his head a queer little cap with a knob on the top of it. He got his name from the fact that he always wore wooden shoes."

I laughed as I took up the book again.

"This afternoon, as we were lying on the grass, 'bump!' came a little Demoiselle monoplane from apparently nowhere and landed in our midst. It turned out to be a student from a nearby aerodrome. His motor had stopped in mid-air and he was forced to volplane to the ground. After some tinkering he limped away, swinging like a pendulum. These watch-charm airplanes may be all right for consumptives, but

they don't look as if they could lift a life-sized man three inches. A hard landing in one of them would mean an engine through the back of the head, an iron spike between the shoulder blades—for the control rod runs up your back—and a none too soft seat on terra firma.

“Jan. 20th. My, but flying is the king of sports! We grass-cutters are not supposed to fly until we have practised lawn-mowing for a week or two, but I managed to get in ahead of the game. As I peddled the bicycle I had hired for five francs a week over to the aviation field this morning, I prayed that old Wooden Shoes would be in a good humour, for I hoped that he would let me try my luck in the air. He of the dainty footgear told me to do some grass-cutting, but under no circumstances to leave the ground.

“The grease-covered mechanics wheeled out one of the patched up machines kept especially for ‘taxi-drivers,’ like myself, and I clambered into the cockpit. The cane-bottom seat was not more than ten inches wide and its back consisted of a strip of three-ply veneer, three inches wide and a quarter of an inch thick. To make it still lighter it was bored full of holes. The French certainly do peel down their machines to make

them light! I had been told to steer for a pylon at the other end of the field, and as my little monoplane bumped unevenly over the ground, I must have concentrated too much on that pylon and not enough on what I was doing. I pressed my feet so heavily on the rudder cross-bar that the back of the seat gave way, and I slipped over on to the bottom of the fuselage, pulling the elevator control toward me as I went. Not realizing in the least what had happened, I scrambled back into position as quickly as I could. Instead of being on the ground as I supposed, I was three hundred feet in the air, and still rising! Didn't I thank my lucky stars, then, for the practice I had had flying in bed! Except for that, I wouldn't be here tonight writing this diary. Between wiggling the rudder with my feet, warping the wings to keep the horizon where it belonged, and pushing and pulling the elevator to stop the earth from jumping up and down, I had a busy sixty seconds.

"I boldly struck out around the field and had no difficulty in making the first turn. It was so much fun I kept on and made another. As I neared the finish line I could see old Wooden Shoes waving me down as if he had gone mad. I was beyond his reach, though, and decided to

take another turn for good luck. About half way on this last circuit my motor began to cough molten metal out of the exhaust valves, and the tail of the machine began to droop. I realized that I must come down instantly. It was easy enough to glide downward, but my lack of experience as to the sensitiveness of the controls made me drop at an angle which must have given the onlookers palpitation of the heart. I grazed the roof of a hangar, took several pickets off the fence, and landed on one wheel with a series of bumps, when my oil-cooled Anzani gave out entirely, and died with a consumptive wheeze. Old Wooden Shoes was in a rage. I shall never forget the way his sabots kept time with his machine-gun French as he called me everything impolite he could think of. But I didn't mind. I had really flown!

"Tonight, as I peddled back to the hotel, my thoughts kept pace with my feet. I made plan after plan about what I should do when I returned to America a finished flyer. To think I was a real birdman at last! The dream of Darius Green had come true for me! I simply could not grasp it. The five miles of road flew under my tires like so many city blocks as I dreamed of triumphs ahead."

"I wish you hadn't stopped your diary there," I said, handing him back the book. "Did you get your license right off?"

"The Aero Club of France gave me my 'brevet'—that's what they call a pilot's license—after my eighth flight." He slipped the diary back into his pocket and brought out the big book. "We'll be in in a couple of days and I haven't finished this yet."

As he sat there beside me, frowning intently as he read, he might have been miles away. I wondered what his life had been, where he had lived, whether he had brothers and sisters—even a wife, perhaps. No, not a wife, for no man with a wife could ever have been so engrossed in his work. Where was he going? What lay before him? Would he be a conqueror of the air or one of its many victims? Two days more and I might never hear of him again, except, perhaps, to see his name in the paper. Suddenly he closed his book with a bang.

"Let's go look at the stars," he suggested, rising abruptly.

"Like—Betty?"

He looked down with one of his slow smiles.

"Like ourselves."

The night was cold and clear, and the stars flashed down on us in friendly nearness. There they all were—Orion, lifting his starry club to meet the Bull that charged headlong toward oblivion in the western sky; blinding Sirius, the great dog star, and white Capella, “the little she-goat”—even the Twins were there, arm in arm as they’d been for centuries past, their feet in the Milky Way.

We stood for a long time watching the stars. He was strangely silent, even for him. I proposed a walk and he fell into step at my side. When he still said nothing I thought he must be tired and decided it was time to go below.

“You must think me an awful bore,” he apologized, staring at me with troubled eyes, “but I’m in the dickens of a mood tonight.”

I wanted to tell him that I didn’t mind but felt he understood without my saying anything.

With that we said good night and I went down to my cabin. Hours later I awoke to hear solitary footsteps pacing the lonely deck, and I wondered if they could be his.

CHAPTER III

FINDING HIS MATE

OUR last night out was foggy. Betty was spending the evening in a snug corner of the lounge with the ship's doctor. The other passengers were either packing or attending the concert in the salon. Mr. Ovington and I had the deck to ourselves, but instinctively we sought the even greater solitude of the bow. There was a heavy sea on and the steamer rolled and pitched. We heard the water swish against the boat and some of the spray came splashing up into our faces. Little we cared for that, as we stood there arm in arm, laughing like children as we rode the waves. We could hardly see a yard ahead. The fog shut us in on every side.

"If this is fun," I cried, "what would it be to fly on such a night! How I'd love the wildness and danger of it!"

"I really believe you would. I guess it's the danger of flying that's always fascinated me," he mused. "Everybody seems to get killed at

it sooner or later, and I suppose it's coming to me, too. But I mean to have some fun first."

"Does your life belong so wholly to yourself?" I ventured.

"I haven't any immediate ties, if that's what you mean. It won't hurt anybody if I drop out."

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't talk like that," I begged.

"Why should you care—" He pulled himself up abruptly. "I'm going to fly and fly hard. I mustn't forget that I have work to do."

He spoke as one who had dedicated his life to a cause. As I looked at his determined, set expression I wondered if anything could possibly swerve him from his purpose. A sudden dread came over me. He was reckless, there was no doubt about that—young, fearless, and full of enthusiasm. Was this ship ploughing through the waves hurrying him to his death? I tried to shake off the thought. I had a strange feeling, as I glanced at the shadowy outline of his face, that I had known him all my life—that I should always know him, even if I never saw him again. It seemed to me not only that I was alone with him on the boat but that I was alone with him in all the world. The fog cut us off

from the earth and we were apart in the universe with just each other.

His voice broke in on my thoughts.

"Tomorrow, I shall take up life again where I left it off a week ago. I shall always feel that this has been a week that—" he stopped.

"I know," I put in hurriedly. "It's been just like a dream, hasn't it? You are going back to a wonderful life. I hope it will be all that you expect."

"Thanks. Anyhow, I'm going to play the game for all it's worth."

"When do you begin?"

"As soon as I get my bird set up—probably in a week. After I've tested it out at Belmont Park I'll enter the different meets as they come along. Where do you go when you get ashore?"

I told him that I was going to visit some friends in Orange for a week or so, and then go home to Virginia.

"Any place down there for an airplane to land?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes, acres. But the horses would begin climbing trees if you tried it and the darkies turn pale with fear."

"It would be fun to give them a scare. Don't

be surprised to see a big white bird alight on your lawn some fine day."

Of course I knew that he was joking. I was certain that when we parted next morning we would never meet again. I could see that flying was everything to him; that he was completely absorbed and fascinated by it; that he had made up his mind not to let anything interfere with his work.

I was surprised a little later when I said good night to have him raise my hand impulsively to his lips. The next second he was his same collected self again, and we parted almost like strangers. Although I went straight to my cabin and was soon in bed, I could not go to sleep for hours. All the time I lay awake I heard the same footsteps I had heard before striding up and down the empty deck, this time rapidly, almost feverishly, as though some fight were on.

At breakfast the next morning everybody turned out in land clothes, very different from the sweaters and sea togs to which we had become accustomed.

As we drew near the great dock with its crowd of upturned faces, it seemed as though we could

hardly wait for the gang plank to be run out, we were so eager to rush ashore.

Betty was waving excitedly to a tall, good-looking young fellow, who, she told me, was to meet her. From the way he looked at her it was plain that her little face was the only one he saw.

The homecoming of our birdman had been announced by wireless. Half a dozen reporters were waiting for him. No sooner had he stepped from the gang plank than they swept him off to an obscure corner of the dock where they could interview him and photograph him to their hearts' content. There was no chance for him to so much as wave a good-bye to us. Glad as I was to see my friends from Orange, I suddenly felt as though the bottom had dropped out of everything. If he could let me go out of his life without a thought, why could I not do the same? But no, try to deny it as I would, I felt strangely miserable and alone. For the first time I began to realize how much his daily companionship had meant to me and how hard it was going to be to get along without it.

I tried to be cheered by a telegram which came

that night from Betty. "We were married today at six o'clock." I was glad she was happy, but somehow it made me feel lonelier than ever.

"Earle Ovington to Fly up Broadway." "Up Broadway in Airplane is Birdman's Plan." The papers the next morning were featuring him on the front page with big headlines, and gave lengthy descriptions of the daring young aviator who had just returned from France with a powerful monoplane, prepared to startle the world with his sensational feats. More than ever I realized what a gulf lay between us. Over night he had become a celebrity and his success had only begun.

I don't know how I got through the days that followed. It was the most miserable week I'd ever spent, but it fell away from me like a dream when I was called to the telephone and heard his voice again. Betty had given him my number. He explained that he had been having trouble getting his airplane through the customs—even now it had not been delivered to him—but he hoped to have it soon. Before he rang off he asked if he might come to see me the next day.

The next day was Sunday and I shall never forget how I felt when I saw him coming up the

walk. When we shook hands and I realized that he actually stood before me in the flesh, I felt as though I could never be unhappy again. He came soon after breakfast. My friends, who liked him from the first, asked him to dinner—and he stayed. Later they asked him to supper—and again he stayed. Then he stayed all the evening without being asked. At the end of his little twelve-hour call he left. I don't know how my hosts felt about it, but it seemed more like twelve minutes to me.

A week later I had a letter from him saying his machine was through the customs and that he hoped to have it set up in a few days. Would I come out to Belmont Park on Tuesday to see it?

He came in to New York to get me and together we took a train for Queens. We got off at the little station and followed the railroad tracks to the aerodrome, a few minutes' walk away. The first thing I saw was a long row of sheds or hangars, which I afterward found sheltered nearly every known species of airplane and would-be aviator. In one of them was housed my ship-mate's bird.

Never before had I had such a close view of an airplane. This racing Bleriot struck me

as so beautiful that it fairly took my breath away—the light fuselage, so trimly built for speed; the tightly stretched wires; the powerful, glittering engine; the polished walnut propeller; the slim wings spread as though they were already poised for flight.

Except for the adjustment of the wires it was all ready to go up, and Mr. Ovington immediately set about giving it the final touches. I handed him a monkey wrench, pliers, or other tools as he needed them, glad to feel that I was helping. In the midst of it several newspaper men and photographers arrived and began asking questions.

This was the first seventy-horse-power racing Bleriot ever brought to this country, and naturally they all wanted to see it. Then they began examining the controls. One of the men asked how they worked.

"I'll show you," volunteered my companion, climbing into the seat.

"If I wish to turn to the left I push the left foot forward. This moves the rudder, which is very similar to the rudder on a boat. If I wish to go to the right I press the right foot forward. But in an airplane you not only go to the left and right but up and down as well. In order

to do this, I push and pull this lever between my knees, which is connected by wires with the elevator. I push the lever forward when I wish to go down, and pull it toward me when I wish to rise."

"That doesn't sound very complicated," one of the men observed. "Where does the danger come in?"

"If a plane is left for a second to its own devices it tips and begins to shoot sideways instead of going forward. Then you get into the deadly side-slip. To keep the machine from tipping, that is, to preserve its lateral stability, you must move this same lever to the left or right, which warps the wings and keeps the machine on a horizontal keel. It isn't as easy as it sounds, and requires a lot of agility on the part of the driver—both mental and physical. If I should move the lever a bit to the right when it should go to the left, it would mean a side-slip or a side somersault. In either case it might easily be the end of me."

The men laughed, but I couldn't see the joke. Those few careless words were to haunt me for many a day to come.

When the reporters had satisfied their curiosity about the control of the machine, the

photographers said they wanted to take some pictures. So the bird was wheeled out into the sunshine and my companion got into his aviation togs. This was the beginning of what afterward proved to be five months of posing for newspaper photographers all over the country.

I was standing in the background watching what going on, when one of the camera men caught sight of me, and to my horror I heard him ask,

"Don't you want Mrs. Ovington in the picture?"

Without the glimmer of an eyelash the rascal replied,

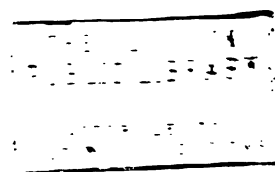
"Why yes, of course."

Treating the whole matter as a joke, I decided the best thing I could do under the circumstances was to get into the picture. But that was not the end of it. I got into nearly every picture that was taken that afternoon.

It was not until we were back in the hangar and the men had gone that I realized what an awful thing I'd done. Those pictures would come out next day in the newspaper and in all of them I would be labeled "Mrs. Ovington!" My face must have shown how disturbed I felt,



We spent our honeymoon among the airplanes



for my companion asked me what the trouble was. When I told him he said gravely:

"I see only one way out of the difficulty."

"What's that?" I asked anxiously.

"By the time tomorrow comes you must really be Mrs. Ovington."

I didn't think he could be in earnest and tried to laugh it off, but he seized my hands and said fiercely,

"Look here, Adelaide Alexander, I mean every word I'm saying. I've fought like a tiger against loving you. I've walked the deck for hours trying to put you out of my mind. I determined I would *not* let you come into my life, and yet—here you are! I thought flying was everything to me. It was everything until I woke up one morning and found that you meant more. No use trying, girl, I shall never be happy without you—never be able to fly or do anything else worth while. I can't put you out of my mind, and I'm not going to let you go out of my life."

I don't know how I managed to tell him that I didn't want to go out of his life, which I suddenly realized very clearly. But I must have conveyed the idea to him somehow, because the next day we were married in the tiny chapel

of the Little Church Around the Corner, with the clergyman's secretary as a witness.

Then we went joyously back to Belmont Park to spend our honeymoon among the airplanes.

CHAPTER IV

HIS FIRST FLIGHT

O.H, what a time I had trying to call my husband by his first name! I didn't know him well enough before we were married for such familiarity. Our wedding had come about so suddenly I could not realize yet what had happened. This was hardly to be wondered at, for we had never been engaged—had not even been introduced—and had seen each other on only thirteen of the twenty-five days that elapsed between our meeting and marriage.

On the very day of our wedding I had expected to go back to my old home in Virginia. Instead, here I was, set down at a little place called Queens, which I had heard of for the first time the afternoon before, with a brand-new wedding ring flashing up at me from my left hand. It was so shiny it seemed to me everybody must be looking at it, and I couldn't keep my eyes off it myself.

When, after several awkward attempts at "Earle" I managed to compromise and say

"O-Ovie" I began to feel more at ease. I can't say that my name troubled him, though, for he took possession of me as calmly as if he had always had a wife. And, as was typical of him, he believed in no half-way measures. No intermediate stage of Adelaide would do for him. He jumped straight from calling me Miss Alexander to Dell.

Before this, things had always belonged to me; now I belonged to him, just as his airplane did, and I was old-fashioned enough to like it. In time, I thought, I might even come to mean as much to him as his precious old machine, and I cast about for the quickest way to catch up with my rival.

Well, one thing I could do, which a Bleriot could not—I could make a home for him.

We had the whole top floor in a private house, within a stone's throw of the aviation field. Ovie had managed to get as close as he could to his hangar without actually roosting on it. And bare little boarding-house rooms they were, with their varnished golden-oak furniture and curtains of Nottingham lace. It was all so different from what I had been used to that I don't know why I wasn't homesick, but I wasn't, even for a minute. I had such fun when my trunks

came, rummaging through them for things to make the place look livable. Except for a picture of my old home, a snap shot of my dog Hamlet, and a gay cushion I had planned to give black Helen, I found little that would do. But Ovie scared up a Technology flag, and also produced a huge scrap book, over which I was later to labour for many an hour pasting in press notices about his flights. Little as we had to make it so, the place was a home before we knew it.

To my joy I found that my trunks contained nearly everything I needed for my wedding outfit. Like most girls, I had laid in a supply of French frocks and lingerie while in Paris, never dreaming that it would turn into a trousseau on the way over.

I had barely finished unpacking when I heard a strange sound, like the droning of a great dragonfly. Rushing to the window I saw, hovering high above the aviation field, an airplane gleaming white and gold in the sunshine. I realized then that my new life had begun.

Ovie now spent almost every minute in the shed studying his machine, while I sat on a box near by, studying Ovie. He was a new mental type to me, and I was trying to understand him.

I had plenty of time for my thoughts. Sometimes for half an hour he wouldn't speak a word—just tinker away, loosening a wire here and tightening one there. But somehow I felt, whether he talked or not, that he knew I was with him, and that he was glad to have me.

The more I came to know Earle Ovington the better I realized how well fitted he was to be an aviator. I knew he possessed a superb, almost reckless courage, but I was relieved to discover that at the same time he showed a minute, laborious, never-failing forethought regarding the risks before him. He was willing to take his life in his hands when he went up in the air, but first he wanted to be absolutely certain that his plane was in perfect condition.

We began the first day of our honeymoon with a tour of the hangars to see the freak machines which were being built. These barn-like sheds housed a little colony of enthusiasts who spent their time experimenting with widely varied types of mechanical birds. Some of them were so outlandish that we could hardly believe they were meant for airplanes. One was almost the exact image of a tortoise, while another was nick-named the "Flat Iron Building." That the bulky, ungainly thing could ever fly was

preposterous—that it could even run across the ground without toppling over was hard to believe.

I remember the pathetic case of two brothers who occupied the hangar just above Ovie's. They were in the grip of the old pendulum idea, which had long before been proved a fallacy. Yet these two boys, who would have been better off as clerks in a grocery store, were spending their last cent and all their energy building a worthless machine. No matter when we arrived we always found them there before us, for they came early and stayed late. In the morning they would bring with them a loaf of bread, a little butter, some dried meat, and a bottle of coffee. At lunch time we would see them heating their coffee in an old tin pail over a bon-fire in their shed, their gaunt, thin faces showing only too plainly their underfed condition. Yet they were glad to sacrifice everything if only this monster of their imagination might grow.

Ovie had a talk with them one day to see if he could not avert the final hour of ruin. He was amazed to find that although neither of them knew the first thing about flying, they meant to try out the machine themselves. Take

an aviator who has never flown and put him in an absolutely impractical machine and you have a pretty hopeless combination. Of course there would be only one result—a smash. The pitiful part of it was that if these boys survived the experiment, we knew they would start rebuilding their machine as soon as they were out of the hospital.

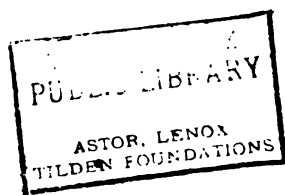
The parachute was a favourite scheme with some who were ignorant of the fundamental laws of aviation. Even if the idea had been practical in other ways, an aviator who is falling to his death doesn't have a chance to operate parachutes—he is usually upside down before he has time to think about it.

And yet these inventors worked away contentedly month after month, some of them sleeping at night under the strange aircraft which claimed their thoughts by day. They were often ill fed and scantily clothed, but they were happy in the delusion that in the near future their names would be flashed around the globe.

After seeing all these crude machines, my slim white rival, with its finished workmanship and graceful lines, looked more beautiful to me than ever. Its slender wings spread for flight, this high strung racer of the air seemed to be



A mascot which he had brought from Paris



alive. I began to understand how Ovie felt about it, for I was growing really fond of it myself.

Finally the day came when he pronounced it ready for its momentous first flight. To be sure, two things still remained to be done. One was to have "13" painted on the tail in large black figures. The other was to strap into place a mascot which he had brought with him from Paris—a little gendarme named Treize, after his owner's lucky number.¹ These details attended to, the plane was wheeled out for the start. Putting on his goggles and his helmet—a steel casque covered with leather and lined with mineral wool—Ovie climbed into the seat.

Whenever Ovie got into his airplane—as he did many times a day to try the controls or make some little change in the adjustments—

¹ Ovie had decided to take 13 for his number for three reasons: first, it was good publicity; second, he knew other people wouldn't want it; and third, the number had been practically thrust upon him. It came about in this way:

He ordered his Bleriot monoplane on January thirteenth. When he went to Pau to learn to fly he was put in room thirteen at the Hotel de Londres. When it came his turn to sign at Bleriot's school he noticed that 13 was opposite his name. When he took delivery on his machine it was March thirteenth. Finally, when he came through the customs and brought his airplane in under bond, 13 was in large figures on the paper handed him, showing that he was the thirteenth aviator to bring a machine into this country.

a sudden calm and self-possession would settle down upon him. This was even more noticeable today, when he got into his machine prepared to fly. His whole attention was concentrated on the task before him. He was sure of himself and that made me sure of him. As he sat there, his steady hands grasping the controls, his nerves seemed made of iron. I knew that in an emergency he would act with fearless resolution. A moment's hesitation might cost him his life—but he would not hesitate. Little as I knew about aviation, I realized that if one wire broke while he was in the air it would mean certain death—but that wire would not break. He had spent too much time in tuning them all up to exactly the right pitch.

At Pau he had never flown anything but a little twenty-five-horse-power Bleriot with an Anzani engine, and this new machine was a racer driven by a seventy-horse-power seven-cylinder rotary Gnome motor. His airplane had never even been flown, as it was not customary in those days to test the planes before shipping them from the factory.

A mechanic from a neighbouring hangar turned the big propeller. After two or three revolutions of the polished blades, the engine

started with a roar. Half a dozen near-aviator friends clung to the tail of the machine bracing themselves with all their strength to hold it back. When Ovie raised his hand for them to let go, the plane raced across the field, gathering speed as it went, and rose into the air.

In what seemed a few seconds it was hundreds of feet about us. Then it climbed into a cloud and was out of sight.

There I stood on the ground, alone among strangers. A few moments before my husband had been on the field close by, and now he was—nowhere. I tried to make myself understand what had happened, but it was not easy. It was all too unreal and like a dream. I began to wonder if it were not all a dream, if I had ever had a husband, or if there had ever been such a person as Earle Ovington.

It seemed ages before he came back into my world again, and then only as a tiny dot in the distance. But the dot grew and grew until it was like a big white bird. High above our heads it circled, gliding, soaring, swerving, dipping, far more at home in the air than it had ever been on earth. I felt as though Ovie had acquired some new power. Man and machine were one.

I was so lost in admiration that I realized with a start the sun was setting. Unless my aviator husband came down very soon it would be too dark for him to see the field. It was still quite light where he was—did he know how dark it was getting on the earth? It seemed a long time before he cut his engine off and came gliding down. The wheels of the airplane touched the ground, and the big machine rushed with terrific speed straight toward a white fence which shone out faintly in the twilight. Would he see the fence? My heart was in my mouth. Another second and he would have smashed into it, but he put the power on just in time to clear it and soared again into the air. He made a short circle about a hundred feet above the ground and pointed the plane toward the very centre of the field, landing with a bump. A gust of wind caught the machine and spun it round on one wheel. But the well-made monoplane stood the strain; soon righting itself, it came to a standstill.

As Ovie jumped from the machine I saw that his face was splashed with oil. Some, he said, had even got into his eyes, half blinding him. That, and the ever-increasing darkness, had made the landing difficult.

Poor little Treize, perched on the wires of the fusilage, had also had a shower bath of oil, which didn't improve his appearance any more than it did his master's.

The newspaper boys, who had been waiting with note books and pencils, trailed after us as we walked toward the hangar, and took down the new birdman's words.

"Great day for flying!" Ovie laughed exultantly. "Couldn't have been better. This is the first flight I've ever made when I've had time to enjoy myself. Before, I've always been too busy trying to keep right side up.

"At about two thousand feet I got into a cloud-bank—like being lost in a London fog. I could hardly see the outline of my engine hood, and, of course, the earth was all blotted out. But I climbed through the mist into the bright sunshine above. From where I was, the clouds seemed like a layer of cotton wool under my feet.

"I can't tell you how different things look when you're half a mile up in the sky. You see, at that height, the perspective is very poor. I get practically a flat view. Hills, of course, disappear. Planted fields of grass and grain make the ground look like a great checker board of every shade of green.

"Except by looking very closely it's impossible to make out people. Automobiles look like ants. A black crawling thing, following a couple of silver wires, is a railroad train going a mile a minute—it seems to be just creeping along. What I know to be a busy world appears from that height fast asleep."

"How does it feel to be up in the air?" asked one of the boys.

Hundreds of times in the next five months Ovie was to be asked that question, but he was still new to flying and so he answered,

"Oh, I can't describe it, but it's great! You feel so elated and exhilarated. Funny thing about it, though, you may be going through the air at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, but if you're high enough up you seem to be standing still. There you hang in a measureless void with a giant fan motor blowing in your face. You can take it from me, boys, this flying game's sure to be popular. You earth-bound mortals don't realize yet what fun it is!"

"Maybe you'd like this for a souvenir, Mr. Ovington," said one of the boys with a grin, pulling a yellow slip out of his pocket.

Ovie read it, then he tossed it to me with a laugh.

"Here, girl, is something for your scrap book."

ART DEPARTMENT

New York ~~Times~~ American

Boyd
Cover creation
at Belmont Pk.
to-day. Irvington
will fly & they
expect him to
break his neck
The photog had
better get out
about there & Chick
Wallace

BELMONT PARK
PUBLIC EXHIBITION
MAY 21, 1911.

Ovie chuckled. "I hope that photog. wasn't too much disappointed."

CHAPTER V

PUTTING BRIDGEPORT ON THE MAP

O VIE now acquired two mechanics, Alfred and René. They were both from gay Paree—and looked it. Their trim moustaches and picturesque costumes gave them a foreign air. They always wore soft black shirts with turn-down collars, khaki knickers, and puttees.

From the moment Alfred entered Ovie's service there were only two interests in his life: his master, whom he adored; and the beautiful Gnome motor, over which he slaved joyously night and day. He gloried in Ovie's successes just as if they were his own, and indeed he had no small part in them, for a good mechanic is half the battle. My, but Alfred knew that engine backwards! Taking down a seven-cylinder French aviation motor, which is made like a watch, and putting it together again, is not a job for an ordinary mechanic. Before an important meet I have known Alfred to work all night without a wink of sleep, taking every screw out of the engine until he had over a

hundred parts spread around him on the floor. The next morning Ovie would find his motor all set up and running like a sewing machine, with Alfred, red-eyed but triumphant, gloating over it.

René, his handsome assistant, was said to be a fellow of some means. He had been sent to this country by his parents to keep him from marrying the girl of his choice. Though he always seemed to me quite well and happy, Alfred would sometimes come to me with pathetic tales of how René was pining away from the combined effects of disappointed love and American cooking.

René didn't know a word of anything but French, but Ovie and Alfred were able to meet on a common ground of pidgin English. It was funny to hear Alfred trying to make his French sound like English, and Ovie trying to make his English sound like French. Many a time I have heard Ovie ask gravely,

"Alfraïd, how iss ze motaire zis day?"

"Ah, monsieur, ze motaire iz pairfect!" Alfred would answer with equal seriousness.

Alfred and René spent every minute of our last week at Belmont Park getting the machine ready for Ovie's first public meet, which was

to be held at Bridgeport, Connecticut. Then they took the plane to pieces. Ovie had to be there to see that each wire was properly detached—or at least he thought he did—and of course I thought I had to be with Ovie. Not until the dismembered bird was safely loaded on the truck and started on its travels, guarded by the two mechanics, did we set out for Bridgeport ourselves.

On the train we made up our minds that it was quite unnecessary for the people at the hotel to know what a short time we had been married. My ring no longer seemed so conspicuous, and I felt sure I could play the rôle of an experienced matron. At breakfast the next morning Ovie unfolded a newspaper, and after handing me part of it, proceeded to lose himself behind the rest. We thought that the best way to act like an old married couple was to entirely ignore each other. The waiter stood indifferently nearby, suspecting nothing. Then he put the coffee in front of me and I poured out a cupful for Ovie.

"Do you take sugar in your coffee, dearie?" I asked, forgetting my assumed rôle. As soon as the words were out of my mouth I realized what I had done. We glanced up at the waiter

and then at each other. He managed to suppress a smile and we knew the secret was out. But there was no deceiving Bridgeport anyway—our camouflage had been in vain. As Ovie turned over a page a four column picture stared him in the face, with big headlines, "Earle Ovington and His Bride of Two Weeks."

The meet was to be held at Steeplechase Island. Why it should be called a meet I can't imagine, as no other aviators were there—in fact, no flight had ever been made in the State of Connecticut. Two men had tried it once, and thousands of people had assembled to see them fly, but they hadn't even left the ground. Naturally, the good folk of Bridgeport were sceptical; they had no ocular proof that aviators ever did leave the ground. So, instead of getting an enthusiastic reception, Ovie was received on all sides with doubt and mistrust.

As we entered the aviation grounds a small boy jumped on the step of the car, and stuck a handful of Ovie's pictures in his face.

"Buy 'is photo, sir, 'fore he's killed!" he yelled.

It made me turn cold, but Ovie laughed and bought the whole set.

His face fell, though, when he saw the flying

field. Glenn Curtiss had written him that he was a fool to try it, and I heard him tell his manager that if he had known how small it was he never would have come. Now an aerodrome ought to be at least half a mile in length, and this was the inside of a third-of-a-mile bicycle track—less than eight hundred feet from end to end, instead of over two thousand five hundred. Not only was the space absurdly small, but the ground was so soft and sandy that Ovie was afraid it would be impossible to get up speed enough to rise. He shook his head. It certainly did look risky. But what could he do? The two previous aviators had failed to fly there, and everybody made fun of Ovie. Even the newspapers spoke of the event as a joke. No, there wasn't any way out of it. He simply had to make good during this, his first engagement, if he ever expected to succeed as an exhibition flyer. Moreover, the crowd peering at him through the wire fence was growing more sceptical every minute. He turned to me, and when I saw his set look I knew that he had made up his mind.

"Watch me make them change their expressions!" He laughed, with a hard note in his voice that I had never heard before.

The bird had been set up in an old battered barn, one side of which had been removed to allow its new tenant passage to and from the field. Promptly at the time advertised for the opening of the meet it was wheeled to the extreme edge of the enclosure, so as to take advantage of every inch of space. Ovie, after his usual inspection, took his seat. For the first time he put on his life belt. This was a heavy leather affair about eight inches wide with snaps that fastened to rings in the seat. It was to keep him from being thrown out by any sudden dip or lurch of the machine.

"Moisant might have been alive today," Ovie told one of the reporters, as with steady hands he began strapping himself in, "if he'd worn a belt like this. He was killed by being thrown out of his machine. Even if your plane turns a somersault, you stand a chance of regaining control after you come right side up if you're strapped to the seat."

No one in that crowd realized what terrible odds Ovie had against him in trying to rise from the small aerodrome. When he made a sign that he was ready, and Alfred spun the big propeller, I held my breath in an agony of suspense. I saw the airplane start across the field,

ploughing its way through the heavy sand. I saw Ovie depress the tail and try to climb, but—the machine didn't rise. It flashed over me that there were only two courses open to him. One was to cut the engine off and plunge straight into the crowd, which, unconscious of its danger, was packed directly in his path. The other was to keep the power on, and with a superhuman effort try to rise. If he failed, as he so easily might, the sharp blades of the whirring propeller would mow down that mob as a scythe mows down a field of grain. Again he lowered the tail, and this time the machine rose at a sharp angle. Those people never knew what a narrow escape they had. He barely cleared them.

Back of the crowd was a pavilion, and sitting on a low wall which skirted the edge of the roof, their feet dangling in mid-air, were six or eight newspaper photographers staring into their big boxlike cameras. Ovie made straight for them at a mile a minute. One by one they looked up, terrified, and tumbled backward on the roof. I can see them to this day as they rolled over, their feet and arms silhouetted against the sky. One photographer held his position much longer than the rest, and only fell backward when Ovie

passed directly over his head. We found later that he kept his presence of mind until the last, as he pressed the button of his camera in the act of falling over, just as the monoplane was in the centre of his plate. As a result, he got the best picture that has ever been taken of the bird in flight.

It seemed as if the machine would crash into the roof, but at the last moment Ovie pulled the elevator control and the plane rose suddenly and missed it by a couple of feet. Then it soared high above our heads.

Now that the aviator was up, the enthusiasm was tremendous. The field was ringed with up-turned faces, sceptical no longer, but alive with wonder and admiration.

The great bird circled round the course, now volplaning to within a few feet of the earth, then rising again and cutting graceful figure eights. Like a sea gull it sailed far out over the water, then turned and came back again, as though unwilling to leave us. The crowd was wild with excitement. As the papers afterward expressed it, Bridgeport went aviation crazy.

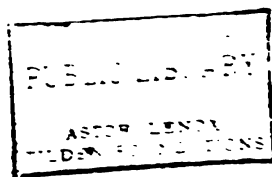
But they got another thrill that afternoon that was not on the program. Ovie must have

been about two thousand feet above us, when I saw his machine give a sudden lurch. The wings tipped until they stood on end, and the plane came shooting down out of the sky. A gasp of fear and pity swept the crowd. We stood awestruck, waiting for the quick plunge to earth. Where would he fall? As for me—in a few seconds I lived an eternity. Down he came, his machine careening crazily as if it had passed entirely out of his control. Then, as suddenly as it had capsized, it righted to an even keel, and Ovie went on flying as though nothing had happened. He made giant circles over our heads, banking his plane steeply in short turns and spiral glides, as if to show his utter contempt for the element he had just mastered.

How the crowd did cheer when he landed! But that landing was not as simple as it sounds. Because the field was so small, Ovie came down hard, hoping in that way to check his progress. The result was that he bounced fifteen feet into the air and came down again. This time the wheels dug heavily into the soft sand, which brought the machine to rest so quickly that the tail reared, and the airplane almost pitched forward on its nose.



He struck an airhole with one wing, and a boulder with the other.



The newspaper boys crowded around him before he had time to get out of the machine.

"What happened?" they asked.

"Left wing dropped into an air hole, and I guess the right one must have hit a boulder at the same time—anyway, that's the way it felt."

"What are air holes and boulders?" asked one of the boys.

"Just what the words imply," Ovie explained. "An air hole seems to be a big hole in the air. And a boulder seems to be a big lump, but it's really an ascending vertical current of hot air. The winds, such as on the earth, are horizontal—that is, parallel to the earth. 'Upstairs', however, we have in addition vertical currents. We aviators don't mind the horizontal ones, which you call winds, but the vertical or convection currents, sometimes keep us guessing. They are the ones that usually start the dreaded side-slip—you've just seen a sample of it now. I fell like a shot until I regained control."

"How on earth did you do it?"

"There's only one thing to do in a case like that. Fortunately for me I did it—dropped the machine so that the downward plunge gave me a sharp acceleration. At the same time I

jammed over my wing-warping control as far as I could, and the machine righted itself." He started to unstrap himself from the seat. "This belt saved my life, all right. The first time I've worn it, too!"

When we reached our rooms at the hotel Ovie said he thought he would rest a little before dinner, and threw himself face down on the bed. Half an hour went by and he didn't stir. An hour. I told him it was time to dress for dinner, but he didn't hear me. One arm hung limply over the side of the bed just as it had at first. I took hold of his hand. It was relaxed and cold, but he was breathing evenly.

For the first time I realized how terrible the strain on him must have been. He had fallen into an exhausted swoon-like sleep, from which he did not wake for hours.

Was it worth it? Was anything in the world worth what we'd both been through that afternoon.

For the first time I almost hated our big white bird. And yet—this was only the beginning of my career as an aviator's wife.

CHAPTER VI

"ZE TANT BLOW DOWN"

ALL this time I had seen but one aviator, my husband. The poor, misguided enthusiasts at Belmont Park could hardly be called aviators. But at our next meet, which was held at Columbus, Ohio, there were three other flyers, Captain Baldwin, Phil Parmalee, and Tom Sopwith. The four machines shared a big circus tent, each one having a quarter of it roped off to itself. We found Alfred and René busy setting up our bird. A couple of other mechanics—typical Englishmen they were, too, who talked of "petrol" and "paraffin" where other men said "gasoline" and "kerosene"—were putting together an enormous biplane of the Farman type. I looked around for our confrères.

They said Mr. Parmalee was somewhere about, but at first I didn't see him. Just outside the tent, however, stood a big Wright machine almost ready to go up. From beneath it projected a pair of feet which I surmised might belong to the otherwise invisible Mr.

Parmalee. Sure enough, the rest of him soon emerged, clad in brown leather, and covered with oil and smiles. He was one of the Wright flyers, and as his machine could be shipped without taking it to pieces, he travelled without mechanics. He was one of the most cautious aviators I have known, never going up if there was a wind, or taking any chances in his slow-going biplane. For all he was so careful, Parmalee later shared the fate of most of the earlier birdmen.

Before long, Tom Sopwith arrived with one of his sisters. They were English and had been over here only about a month. He was tall and slender, with a pleasant, boyish face and a smile that made you like him instantly. Clad in what I later discovered to be his characteristic garb of white flannels, with a soft silk shirt, he was a striking contrast to the other men. He was a splendid sport in spite of his immaculate get up—which wasn't always so immaculate after a flight. Although competitors at many a meet, he and Ovie became the best of friends. After a short season over here he returned to England and went into the manufacture of airplanes. He supplied the Allies with some of their fastest battleplanes.

His machine was a huge biplane which he called the Family Bus. It was certainly well named. Tom had six sisters besides the one with him in America, but had they all been here and wanted to ride at the same time the Family Bus looked large enough to meet every requirement.

The last of the airmen to arrive was Captain Baldwin, who might have been taken for a middle-aged business man. He was flying a balloon before most of the present-day aviators were born, and is the only flyer in America who holds licenses to operate the three types of air vehicles—spherical balloons, dirigibles, and airplanes.

With him, instead of a mechanic, was his young pupil, Lee Hammond, a good-looking boy with a flashing smile. This youngster was afterward the first aviator to fly in Japan, and he also had many adventures in South America.

The Captain's machine was his own make, and because of its colour was named the Red Devil. He always flew lower than any one else and was much teased in consequence. But the kindly old Captain was a great favourite. Shortly after our entry into the world war he

was promoted to a major, and is now in charge of one of the most important aviation training stations in this country.

Ovie's machine was the only monoplane at the meet, and as such created a sensation. The children nicknamed it the Dragonfly and Ovie liked the name so well that he had it painted in large letters on the underside of the wings.

The meet was to last six days. The first four were uneventful, but on Saturday the Red Devil ran into a fence. Tom flew over in his Family Bus to see if the Captain needed help. Ovie sprinted across the field on foot. They found the airman unharmed and as cheerful as ever. But the Red Devil had sadly mutilated itself, and had not improved the fence.

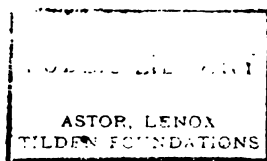
Tom called out to Ovie from his biplane, "Jump in, old top, and I'll cart you back." Ovie accepted the invitation literally. He jumped up beside his brother aviator and stood on the lower wing, grasping one of the struts. Tom, thinking that here was a chance for a little spectacular work, rose a few feet from the ground, and flew, full power on, straight for the grandstand. In landing he didn't notice a hummock which caught his left skid, and the machine pitched forward on one wing. Both



"Ah, monsieur, ze motaire iz pairfect!"



"Ah, monsieur, ze motaire iz parfait!"



men were thrown out violently, though fortunately neither was hurt.

But the Family Bus! It was hard to realize that the poor crumpled thing had ever been such an imposing structure of wood and canvas. It was the first "smash" I had ever seen, and it made a strong impression on me. And when an airplane does smash, its parts are so frail and its wires so taut, that it collapses utterly.

The next day, the last of the meet, there was to be a race for a twenty-five-hundred-dollar cup. Two of the four machines, the Red Devil and the Family Bus, were now out of commission. Phil Parmalee's machine was still intact, and so was Phil Parmalee himself, but he couldn't fly because it was Sunday.

"The Wrights won't let me," he explained regretfully.

This left Ovie the only entrant.

When the time arrived for the "race" a thunder storm came up. Ovie was determined to make the flight just the same, so as not to disappoint the largest crowd of the meet. He told me not to worry if the storm broke while he was in the air because he meant to fly high and dry above it. It had always been a theory of his that such a thing could be done, and I

think he was actually glad of a chance to prove it.

He had left the ground only a short time when I heard the first rumble of thunder, and a moment later saw flashes of lightning on the horizon. Dark clouds gathered quickly above our heads, and cut off our last glimpse of the Dragonfly.

Then the storm broke. Those of us who were on the field took refuge in the tent. I peered out at the dripping world and wondered if Ovie could possibly be dry. I began to wish he hadn't theories, and an airplane for testing them out. The canvas sides of the tent flapped in the wind while the storm raged furiously about us.

A ray of sunshine broke through, and the storm subsided almost as quickly as it had come. It was a glistening world now, with rain drops sparkling on every blade of grass. The birds—I mean the real ones—shook themselves, glad the storm was over, and began to chirp again. The people in the grandstand stopped looking like drenched rats and took a new interest in life. With one accord they gazed skyward.

Sure enough, there was the Dragonfly, at least a mile above us. From that tremendous

height, instead of descending in a spiral as usual, Ovie came coasting down in one giant glide. As the wheels touched the field we ran through the dripping grass to meet him. I had found a four-leaf clover, and as he jumped from the machine I held it out to him.

He started to take it, but his hand dropped and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

For one long awful moment, as I knelt beside him, I thought he was dead. I begged the men to get a doctor. No one had any brandy; no one knew what to do. The men were as helpless as I. I took his head in my arms. I felt him breathe, and then I knew that he had only fainted. A doctor came running from the grandstand.

A few minutes later Ovie opened his eyes and gasped with the most childlike astonishment: “Well, I never did that before.”

We all laughed after the strain of the last few minutes, and the newspaper boys wanted to know what had happened.

“It comes of trying experiments,” he said. “Usually, I stop every thousand feet or so and circle around to get my ear drums used to the denser air. But this time I wanted to see what would happen if I dropped a mile to earth in

one stage. I came down so rapidly that I felt as if some one were running red-hot pokers into my ears. Funny—my head was whirling but my brain remained perfectly clear until I got out of the machine. The last thing I remembered was my wife holding out something for me to take.”

“Tell us how the storm looked from up there,” suggested one of the men.

“Below me on three sides stretched green fields and forests, and on the fourth side lay the big, smoky city of Columbus. Half a mile beneath me was a blanket of dense clouds where the storm was raging. I could see the lightning as it played between one cloud and another. But it wasn’t a brilliant flash as you’d see from the earth against black rain clouds, for my background was a dull grey. The thunder, which I knew must be so loud down here, reached me but faintly. I could imagine the rain soaking everything below, and yet I was flying in the brightest sunshine.”

But that shower could not have used up all the electricity, because there was another storm early the next morning. I was awakened before daylight by a crash of thunder. At first I thought the events of yesterday were haunting

my dreams, but a blinding flash of lightning soon showed me that the storm was real. The thunder was deafening, and all about us raged a howling wind.

I was longing for Ovie to wake up and tell me that everything was all right, but I didn't like to rouse him because I knew he had had such a tiring day. Then something bigger than fear for my own safety came over me. What would become of the Dragonfly, with only a flimsy tent between it and this awful storm? And poor Alfred, sleeping beside it like a faithful watchdog, what would become of him? The thunder was hushed for a moment, and the telephone bell rang out shrilly in the silence. I shook Ovie into wakefulness. “Get up, quick! Something has happened to the Dragonfly, and they want you on the 'phone.” Half asleep he stumbled out of bed and took down the receiver. I could hear the high-pitched French voice, even above the storm.

“Oh, *monsieur, monsieur, ze tant blow down! Vite, vite, venez, monsieur! Ze airplane—*”

Then he was cut off.

We jumped for our clothes. The lights were off because of the storm, and it was slow work dressing in the dark. Then it was an eternity

before we could get a taxi. Finally, we were splashing out of the city to the aerodrome. Typical of our common interest, Ovie never thought of leaving me behind any more than I thought of being left.

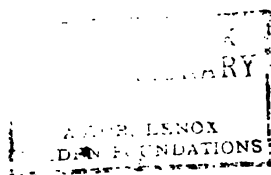
The grandstand loomed large before us in the grey morning light, empty and deserted. The tent was gone—no, it was there, but it lay in a heap on the ground. In collapsing it had fallen to one side. The guy ropes had kept it from blowing away. Where it had once stood was a mass of scattered wreckage. The place looked as if a demon of destruction had been turned loose. Fragments of airplanes met us at every step—shreds of linen, broken struts, twisted wires.

What had been left of Captain Baldwin's Red Devil after Saturday's accident we found lying on its back, with its wheels reaching up like claws to the sky. Tom's Family Bus was still there, standing dejected and alone as though it knew its flying days were over. It had lost its other wing and all its tail feathers as well. There was not another machine in sight.

"Parmalee shipped his Wright back yesterday," Ovie said gruffly. We both knew that did not explain the absence of the Dragonfly.



"Oh, monsieur, ze tant blow down!"



"Funny, Alfred's not here," I said. "Probably he got tired of waiting for us. That doesn't seem like him, though." I knew the same thought occurred to us both, that perhaps he had been hurt—he might even have been 'phoning from a hospital. I was getting really worried, when Ovie, prowling among the ruins, motioned me to his side. There, wrapped in an old overcoat lay Alfred, fast asleep.

"But where's the Dragonfly?" I asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," said Ovie; "but I hate to wake the poor old chap, he looks all in."

Alfred opened his eyes and blinked at us. Then he stumbled to his feet, apologizing for his appearance. It really was funny, though I didn't realize it at the time, for he had his knickerbockers over his pajamas, which made ruffles about his ankles.

His next words were, with a deprecating gesture toward the mass of crumpled canvas, "Oh, *monsieur*, ze tant blow down!"

"So I see," said Ovie dryly, "but where's the Dragonfly?"

"I show you," he said.

He led the way, telling us as well as he could in his pidgin English, that when the storm broke

he had, with the help of the other mechanics, wheeled the Dragonfly from the tent and staked it out in the field. Later he had narrowly escaped death when the centre pole of the tent crashed down upon his cot. He rushed from the tent—or rather the tent rushed from him—and found himself in blinding wind and rain.

But Alfred's foresight had saved the day. There stood the Dragonfly, wet and warped, to be sure, but safe. There it shone, fair and white in the middle of the field, as the sunrise touched its wings.

What had seemed the frailest machine of them all had been the only one to weather the gale.

CHAPTER VII

FIRST AIRPLANE OVER BOSTON

THERE were so many meets coming on now, and so much to be done to keep the Dragonfly in order, that sometimes Alfred and René would have to work far into the night. So Maurice Brun, another French mechanic, was added to our staff when we arrived at Waltham, Massachusetts, where the next meet was to be held.

The field at Waltham was small, but smooth and grassy and, except for a pond surrounded by jagged stumps, a fairly good aerodrome. A large barn had been turned into a hangar for the airplanes, while a tent was provided for Cromwell Dixon's dirigible.

The aviators who took part in this meet were very different from those I had known before, and from each other.

There were two little people whom I will call Mr. and Mrs. James. They had a huge biplane of the Farman type. Mrs. James operated the machine herself—at least, she wore an aviation costume, and was always

going to operate it. The weather conditions never seemed to be quite to her liking, however, for she did not once leave the ground. Her husband did all the flying. He had been professor of astronomy and perhaps took up aviation in order to explore the starry regions of the sky. His early efforts must have been very disappointing, though, for his machine earned the nickname of Ground Hog—it showed such a marked preference to burrowing under the ground instead of soaring above it. His new airplane flew fairly well, but he never quite got to the stars with it—in fact, he never got above the tops of the trees edging the field.

Whenever I go to Waltham now and see those trees I can't help thinking of Mr. James; he made them so his own. Round and round the course used to soar this little vandyke-bearded man, tensely grasping the controls of his huge machine, and looking nervously ahead as if expecting the worst. He always flew as if he did it to please somebody else—certainly not himself—and he always flew over exactly the same ground, until he wore a track through the air at tree top height which became known as "James' Circuit."

Cromwell Dixon, the owner of the dirigible, was barely nineteen, and had the distinction of being the youngest aviator in the world. Four years before he had built a remarkable airship which he called an "aircycle," a cross between a dirigible and a bicycle. It consisted of a cigar-shaped balloon, from which suspended the elements of an ordinary bicycle, with a propeller attached to its rear wheels. When the young aeronaut peddled the machine vigorously, the push of the propeller drove it through the air, while the balloon kept him suspended above the ground. This mere child had peddled his home-made contraption over the city of St. Louis, a feat which many a man might hesitate to undertake, even in a much better airship. Dixon's last flight, a few years later, was a daring attempt to cross the Rockies, which ended in his death.

The dirigible which he brought to the Waltham meet was an improvement over his earlier invention, for he had taken the engine out of his motorcycle and had substituted its power for his own efforts. Because of its colour and shape his dirigible was called the Lemon, and made me think of a clown at a circus. It de-

lighted the crowd with its antics as it went bumping about, in its slow, clumsy way, a few feet above their heads.

There was one more aviator in our little group. Harry Atwood dropped out of the sky one day into our astonished midst, and remained with us until the meet was over. Mr. Atwood had an attractive personality. His build was slight, his eyes grey, and his smile engaging. We soon found that he played the piano as well as he operated an airplane.

The feature of the Waltham meet was Ovie's flight over Boston, and it came about in the most unexpected way. One of the newspaper boys asked him if he didn't want to fly over Boston.

"Why over Boston?" asked Ovie.

"Well, no man's ever done it yet. Last year Grahame-White refused to do it for ten thousand dollars. You wouldn't get any money for it, but you'd get a lot of front page advertising. It doesn't cost any more, you know, to be the first to do a thing than it does to be the fifteenth, and you get a lot more credit for it. Anyway, I'd like to see you do it, because you're an American."

"Very well," said Ovie. "I'll make the

flight tomorrow, if my engine is all right."

The reporter was taken somewhat aback by the suddenness of this decision, but instantly 'phoned the news to his paper, asking the bird-man to keep his plans quiet.

Bright and early the next afternoon Ovie was at the hangar carefully examining every part of his machine. He adjusted each wire to a nicety. It had to be exactly the right tension and emit the correct musical note when struck. Crouching down behind the airplane, Ovie squinted along first one wing and then the other, to see that the forward and rear edges were exactly parallel. He carefully placed a level upon each wing so as to be sure that they were at five degrees with the horizon—that the "dihedral angle," as he called it, was correct. Next, the engine received his attention. While Alfred slowly rotated its seven cylinders Ovie examined each exhaust-spring and the opening of each exhaust-valve. Then he took a look at the magneto, to see if the electric-sparking mechanism was in perfect order. He gave everything the same care and attention, until finally, after perhaps half an hour's inspection, he pronounced the Dragonfly in perfect condition for the flight.

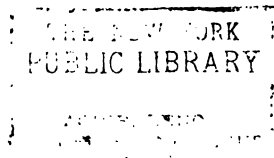
Because of the announcement in the papers, the field was thronged early with spectators. The mechanics wheeled the big machine out upon the level field, while Ovie put on his helmet and adjusted his goggles. Then he strapped himself carefully into the seat and gave the signal to start the engine. With a roar he was off and was soon lost to our sight. The newspaper boys fought with each other for the possession of the telephone to notify their papers that Earle Ovington had started for the State House dome.

Twenty-eight minutes later he was back. Small birds at a distance were at first mistaken for his mechanical flyer, until at last he really came in sight. Far off on the horizon a dark speck appeared, which rapidly grew larger and larger. Soon the speck got lighter in colour and began to take on wings, and finally the giant Dragonfly itself was outlined against the clear blue sky. In what seemed a few seconds it was over our heads, and we heard the drone of the motor stop as the machine dropped rapidly toward the aviation field in a long vol-plane.

The newspaper boys, as usual, were the first to reach Ovie's side, and even before his plane



With a roar he was off



FIRST AIRPLANE OVER BOSTON 79

came to a standstill began to clamour for an account of his trip.

"In the twenty-eight minutes I've been gone," Ovie began, settling back into his seat, "I have travelled about thirty-three miles, at an average speed of more than seventy-five miles an hour. I have passed over Boston twice, circled the harbour, and done a cross-country jaunt above a dozen small towns.

"I had a map of Boston in front of me, because finding your way half a mile up in the sky is very different from strolling along the street where there is a policeman at every corner to direct you.

"I can't go slower than sixty miles an hour in my Bleriot or I would start falling. This high speed, with the intoxicating tendency ever to climb higher, makes it a strain to stay anywhere near earth.

"I had planned to follow the Charles River to Boston, but the wind was behind me, and my engine worked so well that I was going over Newtonville at ninety miles an hour before I realized where I was.

"I could see the Harvard Stadium, like a little white bowl, over in Brighton, and headed that way. Hardly had I glanced up from my map

when the front of my machine cut off my view.

"Then the Back Bay houses came into sight and I turned in that direction.

"My altimeter now indicated that I was just a mile high so after I had passed over the western edge of Back Bay, I decided it was time to drop down and deliver the letters I carried. I had one for the Mayor and one for each of the Boston newspapers. The letters were attached to little parachutes made by my mechanics, and on each of them they had written: 'Greetings from Monsieur Ovington's mechanics, Alfred Panier, Maurice Brun, and René Peroy, all from gay Paree.'

"The gilt dome of the State House was almost beneath me, and I shut off my engine and shot downward. I dropped two thousand five hundred feet in twenty seconds. The wind roared in my ears, yet it seemed as if I were sitting still, and the grey houses and green trees were rushing up toward me at terrific speed.

"Then I started the engine again. The descent was checked, and in an instant I was on an even keel and headed for the open water of the harbour. I dropped my letters quickly. If I had waited any longer, the speed at which I was going would have sent them into the water.

"I was just beginning to enjoy my little trip. The harbour was so near I couldn't resist the temptation of taking a sea voyage. I saw a sparkling bay dotted with tiny flecks of white, and learned from my map it was Pleasure Bay and guessed that the white flecks were yachts. A bit of green off to the northward I decided was Governor's Island and took a turn round it. Still farther there was a lighthouse. A long, black steamship was right below me, probably one of the ocean liners.

"I could see the ships along the East Boston shore, and the docks. But not a sound came up to me from below. It was as if I were alone in the world—there was only the angry buzzing of my engine and the roaring of the wind.

"The air over Boston would have cured a Pittsburgher of homesickness. In some places the smoke was thick as fog and hid the city from my sight.

"But worst of all were the air-holes. The atmosphere was like Swiss cheese. I had to be on my guard every second.

"The air currents over the city streets were treacherous past belief. You can never understand it until you have tried flying through them. Scores of times I was tossed about like

a feather. Once my engine stopped. I was just debating whether to land on the Common and kill a couple of dozen people, or in the Charles River Basin and kill myself. Then I noticed that I had shut off the gasoline lever with my knee. In a moment I had power again, and decided not to kill anybody.

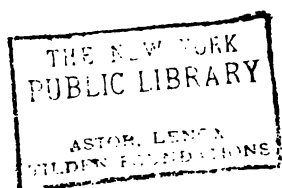
"After a turn over East Boston I realized it was time to think about home. So I flew over the docks and turned up a narrow bluish ribbon which I thought was the Charles. I was up only fifteen hundred feet now and circled for altitude. Then I noticed another river over to the southwest and knew I was lost. Studying my map I found that I was heading up the Mystic River. So I crossed over Charlestown and struck the Charles River near the dam. I was now so high that I could see the aviation field and its pond ten miles away in Waltham. It looked like a silver dollar on a bit of soft green velvet. The black crowd bordering the field marked it so plainly that I found my way back without difficulty."

One of the papers the next morning gave a very graphic picture of what the crowd in Boston saw:

"Because of the big headlines 'Earle Oving-



"I turned up a narrow bluish ribbon which I
thought was the Charles"



ton Will Fly over Boston Today', by three o'clock the roofs of the city's business centre were swarming with humanity, whose expectant eyes were fixed upon the northwestern horizon.

"From somewhere arose the cry, 'There he is!' The news travelled like a big wave from one roof to another, and to the streets below. A tiny speck emerged from the haze of the northwest. Out of the clouds it came, directly toward the State House dome. Now it had grown into a huge white butterfly, with taut wings, outstretched.

"To the northward sailed Earle Ovington, the first aviator to have the honour of flying over this great metropolis. The butterfly in the distance changed into a giant hawk. Whirling, the Gnome motor could be seen glittering in the sun. Behind the protecting wings of the monoplane, Ovington's helmeted head was just distinguishable. Excitement was rife in the mob of dazzled spectators, and they sent up cheer after cheer.

"The Senate, which was then in session, adjourned as soon as the airplane was sighted, and the parapets of the historic State House were covered with serious lawmakers. Every human being in the great city seemed bent upon

doing his best to welcome the aviator on his memorable flight. One and all, from the news-boys in the streets to the Senators congregated on the Statehouse roof, they added to the great wave of enthusiasm which swept over Boston. If the prim old Puritans who settled the city could have been present, how great would have been their wonder!

"The eight hundred inmates of the Charlestown state prison also had a chance to see the aviator, for he flew directly over the prison yard. A sharply contested baseball game was in progress between two prison teams, when the guard on the wall of the prison yard saw a monoplane coming at high speed through the air. He signalled, and the Warden called the attention of the men to the flying machine. They all craned their necks and looked up.

"Some of the older prisoners, who had never seen an automobile or even a trolley car, could scarcely believe that there was a man directing the little craft way up there in the sky. They took off their hats and waved them in the air, giving three cheers for the man in the airplane.

"In a short time the monoplane was headed on its homeward journey. The great hawk changed into a butterfly, the butterfly into a

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narrow slit, the slit to a dot. The dot disappeared.

“Ovington had made history both for himself and Boston.”

CHAPTER VIII

I GO "UPSTAIRS"

"**I**F anything happens to you, would you mind my being the second Mrs. Ovington?" asked a plaintive voice through the chicken wire fence which held the crowd back from the field. I recognized a girl to whom I had been introduced a day or two before.

"Not in the least," I assured her, and the crowd laughed.

She lowered her voice. "He's so perfectly wonderful!" she breathed. "I never dreamed that any one could be so brave! Don't you adore being with him all the time? He looks so much like a gentleman."

"I'm sure he'd be pleased to hear you say so," I answered coolly, for, to tell the truth, I was getting rather tired of Ovie's adorers. Never being able to get near him, they did all their gushing to me, and seemed to expect me to intercede for them. The birdmen of those early days came in for a lot of hero worship, and a very little of it went a long way with them. They would get as many notes as a matinée idol

and much the same sort. The aviators may have been bored by it all but their wives were even more so. Ovie always turned over to me the pink or blue or lavender envelopes on suspicion, but most of the writers were not as considerate of me as the little girl behind the chicken wire. One skyblue note, I remember, was particularly to the point: "I am a young girl nineteen years old, single, and fair to look at, brave, and will go the limit."

Of another type were Ovie's ex-flames, who were occasionally allowed the privileges of the hangars. Two of them have become my best friends, but on the whole I can't say that I approve of my husband's early taste in girls. I wonder if any wife ever does!

There was one girl, especially, who did her best to make me die of fright. She was our guest one day when Ovie was in the air, and kept clutching my arm with tense, excited fingers, pouring out a stream of questions.

"Oh, look, look! Did you see him do that? What is he doing? What makes the engine sound so queer? Is it going to stop? Oh, if it did he'd be killed! Oh, dear, I wish he wouldn't fly round corners like that! Did you see the machine lurch? I know he's going to

fall out. I don't want to scare you, Mrs. Ovington, but I think he's terribly reckless!"

I was getting all on edge and prayed for some polite means of escape. But the girl was my guest and I couldn't think of any. Then along came that nice Mr. Atwood, just in the nick of time, and asked if I'd like to go up with him. I jumped at the chance. "Take me up as high as you can," I begged.

His machine was a big Burgess-Wright biplane and looked as solid as the earth itself. I didn't see how I was going to get into it, for there were sticks and wires everywhere, but I managed to squeeze under some and over others, and slipped into a seat, with my back to the engine. The minute I was in I forgot all my troubles. Now at last I would learn something about the mysterious element that Ovie had come to know so well—how it felt to leave the earth and come swooping down upon it. Perhaps I might even have red-hot poker in my ears. I almost hoped I would.

Mr. Atwood pointed to a wire above my head and warned me not to touch it. He explained that it cut off the engine. If I so much as laid a finger on it while we were in the air, we would have to come down instantly, no matter what

our landing place might be. I promised not to do anything to cut short our ride, for I was in no hurry to get back to my guest.

A mechanic turned the propellers—this bi-plane had two—and the engine started with a loud tinny sound. When we began to roll across the grass it was like being in a moving house with a boiler factory in the next room. I didn't know when we left the ground. There was no sensation of rising. The earth appeared to be falling away from us as we went higher and higher. I seemed to be in the centre of a terrific whirlwind which fairly took my breath away. I didn't have any hat on, and it would have taken my hair too, if it hadn't belonged.

"How high are we now?" I shouted; but I couldn't hear my own voice above the roar of the engine.

Beneath us moved a changing picture of tree tops, fields and people. We flew low over a meadow white with daisies. The flowers looked so near I wanted to reach out and pick them. I recognized some friends and longed to wave to them, but remembered the wire just in time.

After a while people began to look like dolls, and in comparison we seemed like giants. The

sun was just beginning to sink below the horizon, and I had the odd feeling that we were miles above it.

Sitting comfortably in the well-made chair on my perch, listening to the even revolutions of the powerful engine behind me, I felt very safe. As my glance swept over the broad white wings of the biplane it was difficult to imagine that it could ever fail us. I have heard that most people are conscious of this same illusion of safety during their first flight.

Once, we skimmed so low over the tops of a group of fir trees that I was sure we would brush their branches, but we didn't. On our next dip I listened to hear our wheels get tangled in some telegraph wires, but Mr. Atwood had estimated the distance to a nicety and we cleared them.

After our first swoop earthward, he glanced at me to see how I stood it. Finding me too red and healthy-looking to be in any danger of fainting, he evidently decided to try my nerve. Up we went, in long, steady spirals. It seemed as if we'd never stop. People changed from dolls to ants. Dense woods looked like flat meadow land.

With a reverse movement of the control he

brought the machine to a level keel. Pointing to the altimeter, he managed to shout above the roar of the engine, "Sixteen hundred feet!" The smile on his face added plainly enough, "We'll see about your nerve, young lady!" He pushed the lever forward and we shot toward the earth with increasing velocity.

Now at last I understood what Ovie had meant by the red-hot poker in his ears. My head sang and I felt sure that my ear drums would burst. As we dropped from the brightness of the high altitude to the dimness of the lower twilight, the air seemed almost too heavy to breathe. I wondered how any one could bear to come back to earth so long as it was possible to stay "upstairs."

Mr. Atwood, his strong arms grasping the controls, watched with the eye of an expert for the exact instant to end our descent. Just as our speed was at its highest the machine came quickly to a level and we skimmed along four or five feet above the heads of some photographers on the field. A moment later we came slowly to rest in front of the grand-stand and were greeted with a burst of applause.

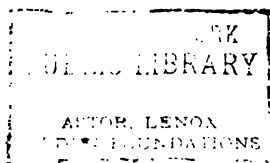
This flight was the first of many I made in different parts of the country. I loved flying

so much that I begrudged every minute I had to stay on earth. I had no desire to operate a machine myself, though. It was much more fun to sit back and enjoy things while somebody else did the work. I never had a chance to go up with my husband, because there was no extra seat in his machine, and he couldn't very well hold me in his lap like a mail bag. But I had lots of rides in Tom Sopwith's Family Bus, not at fifty dollars a trip, either. He never took me as high as Mr. Atwood did, but higher than some of the others went. I remember looking down once and seeing a flash of scarlet go streaking past below me—Captain Baldwin in his Red Devil, hugging the tree tops, as usual.

One of the last flights I made was anything but pleasant. I had never been up with this aviator, and didn't know that he was considered an unsafe flyer. Ovie said afterwards that he would not have dreamed of letting me go with him if he had known about it. But Ovie was in the air at the time and I thought it would be fun to go up and surprise him. I began to regret my impulse before we had even left the ground, for this aviator did not manage his machine with the ease and assurance of the



He passed directly over our heads



practised birdmen with whom I had flown. In the air his poor driving was noticeable, too. This made me realize that operators of airplanes differ as much as drivers of automobiles, who can make the same road rough or smooth by the way they handle the machine.

For a while we just circled slowly and clumsily around the course. I could see the graceful little Dragonfly flashing about in the air above us, at twice our speed. Pretty soon Ovie must have spied us and recognized me, for he came gliding toward us and passed directly over our heads. Again and again he returned, never letting us from his sight for a moment, as though trying to protect me. But finally he couldn't stay up any longer, as he had to go down to a bomb-throwing contest that was on the program.

As the Dragonfly dropped toward the earth we began to rise. For the first time I felt really afraid. We climbed several hundred feet, then turning the nose of the machine to earth, we commenced a long, downward swoop. Ah, ha! I thought, we're going to land! Then my heart stood still—the idiot was keeping the power on. When we got almost down to the field and I felt

sure my perilous ride was nearly over, he reversed his lever and the quivering machine began to rise. He was doing the Dutch Roll with the engine going! What that meant, I knew only too well. A few days before I had seen Badger killed doing that very thing. Even beginners know that you must always cut the power off for a descent, either to earth or in a Dutch Roll. The strain on the machine is terrific if you don't. Poor Badger had tried it and had got away with it once. The second time—I could still hear the splintering wood and the crash as the airplane hit the ground.

Before I could get my breath we had started on another downward drive. The machine felt taut and overstrained. I listened for the first wire to give, for the rip and shear of the canvas and the snapping of the struts. Would I hear the crash when it came, and, worst of all, would Ovie see me when I fell?

I sat rigid, waiting for the shock. But again the machine quivered and rose. Satisfied now with the effect he had produced upon the spectators, my companion shut off the power and slid down to the field.

Ovie lifted me out of the machine as though I were a child. He held me for a minute in his

arms, and my, didn't it seem good to be there! Then he turned, and without any old-fashioned scruples about what a woman should hear, began telling that man what he thought of him.

I always did like to hear Ovie talk.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY

THE Waltham meet was a sort of long-drawn-out Christmas for us both. People actually vied with each other in giving us presents. They began with an automobile. I was surprised, but I don't think Ovie was. Things had always come to him easily—even a wife. That a concern, managed by hard-headed business men, wanted to give him one of their latest runabouts for the advertising they would get from his using it, did not strike him as the least extraordinary.

The jolly little Mayor of Waltham officiated at the presentation one afternoon before the regular flying hour. "It's the pleasant duty of a Mayor," he said, "to give away things. You already have an airplane, Mr. Ovington, and I now present you with an automobile. I hope I shall soon be asked to give you a steamship, so that you will be able to navigate the three elements—air, land, and water."

The next thing the Mayor was asked to give

Ovie was not a steamship, however, but something very much smaller and more acceptable. The local watch company wanted him to have one of their best chronometers. The Mayor was again master of ceremonies and, as one of the papers put it, "watched" Ovie with what was considered the most accurate portable time-keeper in the world.

But he did not stop even there. Instead, he produced another case from his pocket. "Here," he said, "is the smallest watch made, which I am asked to give Mrs. Ovington for capturing and taming the aviator who made this flight." And the crowd laughed.

Before the meet was finished, the Mayor said that giving us presents was becoming a fixed habit with him. Most of them were for the car. It seemed as though the manufacturers of automobile supplies had banded together for the express purpose of so loading down our little runabout that it could not move.

One company, thinking the horn with which the car was already fitted was not musical enough, gave us an alarm which operated from the exhaust. A rival concern, probably considering our signalling device now too musical, presented us with an electrically driven siren,

but warned us not to use it near a graveyard for fear of rousing the dead.

A company which specialized in lighting systems gave us a set of gun-metal lamps that were designed for a car four times the size of ours. After it had been fitted out with special shock absorbers, a speedometer, and a thirty-pound storage battery for ignition purposes, our little runabout began to look as though it belonged to a salesman of automobile specialties.

A tire company persuaded us that over-size tires would help to foil the puncture demon, and begged us to let them fit the wheels out properly at their expense. I hardly knew that car the next time I saw it. Instead of an ordinary runabout, it looked for all the world like four life preservers rolling down the street with an automobile suspended between them.

Ovie complained, "What's the use of taking money for flying when we're not allowed to spend it?"

But we found one concern that would accept it. No one offered to supply us with free gasoline for life. So we were allowed to spend some of the prize money Ovie made skylarking on liquid refreshment for our thirsty engine. And

this was no small matter, for the donors had generously installed their large touring car engine in our little runabout, and as Ovie insisted upon keeping the throttle open and passing everything on the road, gasoline was an item.

We had now before us a long two months, with no meets in sight until the big one in August, at Chicago. Instead of going back to Belmont Park, however, we decided to make our headquarters at Nassau Boulevard, a neighbouring flying field.

With our tightly packed suit-cases strapped to the running boards, and a steamer rug tucked snugly away in the back, we set forth in all our glittering newness. We were ready to enjoy anything and everything. There was no hurry, so we took our time, travelling or stopping as the whim struck us. It was the nearest we came to a wedding journey.

One evening about dusk, we were bowling along the smooth Boston Post road, when a man popped up from nowhere and began waving a red flag at us. He said they were mending the road and that we would have to make a detour. See that mountain over yonder?

Wall, thar's a sort of road we could take round that-a-way which he guessed might bring us where we wanted to go.

It was already pretty late, and Ovie didn't like the idea, but there was no place nearby where we could put up for the night, so we decided to take our chances. It was a narrow, muddy road, with trees close on either side. Soon it dipped into a small valley and followed along beside a brook. There had been a rain for several days, and the trees were so dense that they cut off any sunlight which would have dried the road. The further we went the muddier it became. Ovie went into low gear. Then he had to open the throttle wide in order to keep us moving at all. Just ahead of us a small bridge appeared. But we stopped before we got there. I say "we" but that didn't include the engine or the rear wheels. They were racing furiously.

Ovie cut off the power and explained to me that as no one had given us chains for our rear wheels, we were stuck. It seemed the irony of fate that, fully equipped as we were, we needed the very thing we did not have.

As well as we could make out in the failing light, we were in the heart of a wilderness.

There was nowhere any sign of life, nor any sound, except the gurgle of the brook which flowed under the bridge a few feet from us. But Ovie said he was going to have a look around, anyway, and see if he couldn't find some one to help him. So he jumped out of the car, only to sink into the oozy mud up to his ankles. "The mud is up to the hubs, and the transmission is half buried. We couldn't be here more permanently if we'd been planted. Make yourself as comfortable as you can, girl, for the Lord only knows how long we'll be here!"

He managed to pull his feet out of the mud, and went slushing away into the darkness. It was long past supper time and I was starving. I had heard of the pangs of hunger and supposed I knew what they felt like, but I got another light on the subject now. There wasn't a thing in the car to eat, and no apple trees along the side of the road, or if there were any, it was too dark to see them.

Ovie's voice came out of the darkness. "Great luck, girl! If we had to get stuck we couldn't have chosen a better place than this."

I wasn't sure that I agreed with him, but I

asked hopefully, "Did you find something to eat?"

"Better than that. I found seven shovels and a pile of boards."

"But we can't eat shovels," I moaned.

"That's all right, you won't have to. I'll have us dug out in no time."

When he came within range of our lights I saw that he had an armful of boards and one of the seven shovels.

"First, to make a platform to keep me out of the mud," said my practical husband.

As he set to work he explained that a construction gang was evidently rebuilding the bridge, for he had come across a big tool box, with the shovels, and a pile of lumber, some of which looked as though it had been used for moulding concrete for the bridge. The platform finished, he went off for more wood. "For a fire, this time—it will keep you warm, and give me a light to work by."

This struck me as an excellent idea, for although it was near the end of June we were in the mountains and I was beginning to feel chilly.

How wonderful it was, I thought, to have such a resourceful husband! I had known him on the sea, and as an airman, but never before had

I realized that he could cope with the problems of an ordinary land-lubber. Again his cheery voice came out of the darkness. "I'm going to have a bon-fire here that will carry you back to your kid days." He dumped an armful of lumber by the roadside and arranged it in a peculiar fashion.

"Where'd you learn to make a fire like that?" I asked.

"From the Indians."

"Camping?"

He nodded. I thrilled with pleasure, for I adore camping. All the time I was discovering new tastes we had in common. This exploring a husband is great fun.

"But we've got one on the Indians!" He poured some gasoline over the sticks, tossed a match on them, and with a fine flare our bon-fire was on.

"Don't you suppose somebody's going to miss that lumber?" I asked, trying to be conscientious.

"I hope they do miss it," he answered fervently, warming his hands at the blaze, "good and hard. They had no business leaving the road in this condition without putting up a red light." He was even more of this opinion be-

fore he got through. For digging us out "in no time" proved literally true. There was no time when he could get us out. He dug away at that mud for two solid hours, with occasional excursions for more lumber to keep the bon-fire going. Its light was essential, but he soon ceased to appreciate its warmth. First he took off his overcoat. Then his inner coat. And after that his vest. "A bathing suit is what I really need," he grunted.

Every half hour or so he would start the engine, but the car never budged an inch. After a last desperate effort he gave it up. "No use, girl, we're here for the night."

"You're sure there isn't a house anywhere near?"

"Not in this God-forsaken spot. Awfully hungry?"

"Oh, NO!" I laughed. "Are you?"

"You bet! But we don't have to go thirsty, anyway." He took a folding cup, went down to the brook, and brought me back a drink. Then he replenished the fire and got into the car.

By the time we settled down it was nearly midnight. At least I call it settled, but all it amounted to was sitting straight up in our seats with the steamer rug spread over our laps.

Still, with plenty of brook at our disposal, and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of fire-wood, we really weren't so badly off. In fact, we began to marvel at our comfort. We became more enthusiastic about it every minute, and said how wonderful it was with nothing between us and the stars. There above us was old Hercules, standing, as usual, on his head. Near him shone the brilliant Northern Crown. There was Cygnus, the Swan, and Pegasus the Flying Horse, who looked more like a box stall than ever. They beamed down on us in friendly fashion and did their best to make us feel at home.

But slowly it dawned upon us that our necks were aching, and there was no place to put our heads. For the first time we began to suspect that our positions were not as comfortable as we had supposed. It came as quite a revelation, because up to this time we had been so sure we were enjoying ourselves. Ovie suggested that we try propping our heads one against the other. That worked very well until one head started to drop off to sleep, when the other head would lose its support with a jerk and both heads would find themselves wide awake, wondering what had happened.

So the night wore itself uncomfortably away, and Hercules sank to his much needed rest—if he ever got any—and Pegasus was in the zenith. Then even Pegasus began to fade. The sky took on a tinge of grey which slowly changed to white, and at last it was morning.

With the first rays of daylight we got down and stretched the kinks out of our joints. Our little car had turned white in the night, for in spite of the fire, it was coated with hoar frost.

"I'm going to look for a house," I said determinedly.

"I know there isn't one," Ovie insisted.

For once he was wrong. There was. A short distance beyond the bridge, which all night had marked the end of our world, was a tiny grey cabin, so much a part of the woods that we didn't see it until close upon it. We couldn't wait for a more conventional hour, so Ovie gave a loud knock.

The little old woman who opened the door looked as though she had stepped out of a fairy tale. And I hope the fairies will be good to her, for she certainly did her best for us. All she had in the house was black coffee, a couple of eggs, and a bit of bread, which she set on the table before us as if it were a feast—and indeed


it was in her eyes. Up to that moment I had never liked coffee, even with cream, but I thought this strong black liquid was the most delicious drink I had ever tasted. I never saw eggs look as small as those did—why we could have eaten the whole hen, and asked for the rooster!

What there was, certainly did taste good, and Ovie wanted to make our hostess understand how much we appreciated, not only the food, but her kindness in giving us her own breakfast. She refused, however, to take a cent. But when she wasn't looking he tucked a bill under his plate.

At sunrise the workmen of the bridge gang came with their horses. They were surprised, and not altogether pleased, to find us there ahead of them. Their boss, indeed, was really quite angry with us because we had burned up all his wood. But his mood suited Ovie exactly, for he was just spoiling for a fight, and sailed into that misguided proletarian full speed ahead. He ended by threatening to bring suit against the construction company for not hanging out red lanterns. This was too much. The boss gave in, and told his men to do everything they could to help get the car out of the mud:

he was only too eager to be rid of us. So they hitched their two-horse-power wagon to our thirty-horse-power runabout and pulled us out in a hurry.

Tired and hungry, and splashed with mud, we climbed into the car, and set off toward our journey's end—and breakfast.



CHAPTER X

"BEWARE OF STRANGE MACHINES"

IT is hard enough for an aviator's wife to be philosophical, even when her husband limits his activities to his own airplane. But when he begins to try out strange machines, she needs something besides philosophy. I learned more about excitement at the Nassau flying field than I had ever known before. And yet when I got there I thought we were going to have a nice, restful time.

The Aviary where the birdmen lived, was a little house which Ex-Lieut.-Governor Woodruff had fitted out for them with every possible comfort, even to a maid and butler from his own establishment. Everything in the Aviary was new and pretty, and very different from the golden oak and Nottingham lace of our earlier home in Queens.

The aviation field was as smooth and green as a piece of velvet. A long row of hangars with electric lights and roomy work benches bordered two sides of the aerodrome. The sheds were painted green and each one had a

large white number on it so that every bird knew the minute it alighted in just which cage it belonged. Flags were flying from the hangars, which gave a holiday air to the whole place.

A more varied set of aviators could not well be imagined than those who lived at the Aviary. There was Tom Sopwith, the Englishman, with his sister; also Cromwell Dixon, the dirigible boy, and little Mr. and Mrs. James. Here alone were three sharp contrasts. Then there was Blanche Scott, a jolly, happy-go-lucky girl who lived in a sort of sky parlor at the top of the house. Being one of Captain Baldwin's pupils she operated a Red Devil, and was one of the few really expert women flyers. "Curley" Webster was a pleasant young fellow with a mop of khaki-colored ringlets which gave him his name. "Curley" was absolutely sure that if he could only be allowed to take an airplane up he would find some means of keeping it there till he was ready to come down. Day after day he wandered around the hangars watching hungrily as the machines were taken out. Once in a while he was permitted to help the mechanics push an airplane to or from the aviation field, an event which made him radiant with

joy. Today he is one of the chief instructors in the Burgess camp, for he not only learned to fly, but, what is not so easy, he learned how to teach others.

At the head of everything, and the moving spirit of it all, was Governor Woodruff. Seldom a day went by that he and his beautiful young wife did not appear on the field. But his enthusiasm did not stop there, for it was through his generosity that this ideal aerodrome was made possible.

It was the custom for Society to turn out every afternoon between four and six to see the flying. Gradually Society began to take it into its head that it would like to do a little flying on its own account; and proceeded to do so at fifty dollars a fly. I shall never forget the terror of one poor leader of the smart set, who felt that she was obliged to go up because all her friends were doing it. It was the thing, and must be done, however frightened she was. Trembling and very white, she climbed into Tom Sopwith's Family Bus and shut her eyes. She was still trembling and very white when she came down, but triumphant. She had flown, and she could say that she had flown, and not one of her friends could do more than that.

I used to wonder if these millionaires, in whose colony we found ourselves, realized what a poky sort of world they lived in. Every blade of grass was cut exactly the same length as every other blade. The trees, even, seemed to have just the right number of leaves, perfectly matched as to size and shape. I did long to get into a tangle of briars with vines running riot everywhere, and plenty of untidy leaves and twigs left lying on the ground. I like things wild and free and natural. I hope I'll never have to be a millionaire.

But I started to tell how I learned some new ways of being frightened.

A young man, whose name I have forgotten, had built himself an airplane along the lines of Ovie's Bleriot. He was not an aviator and he didn't want to risk his machine—he said nothing about his life—by trying it out himself. So he asked Ovie to test it for him. Ovie, of course, was always ready for an adventure, and being an engineer, was interested in any new machine. So he gladly agreed.

Half-past four in the morning was the time set for the trial. It was still quite dark. The world looked so peaceful and so sound asleep at that hour. We seemed the only beings awake

in the universe. There was not a bird chirping, nor the flutter of a leaf. This was just what Ovie wanted for the testing of this new machine and why we were getting up while the rest of the world still slept.

I say "we" as though he couldn't have made the test without me, and that was the way I always felt about his flying. I wanted to be there to see just what was happening. I could no more have stayed away when I knew that he was going up in a strange machine—or any machine, for that matter—than I could have operated one myself. I used to go because I was afraid to stay away. Somehow I felt that my very presence helped, and indeed it did, for it helped me tremendously. And he said it helped him.

Just as the day was breaking we set out for the aviation field. A heavy mist had settled down upon the world. It clung closely to the ground and the grass was reeking wet and white. The mist was so heavy that we could see only a few yards before us. Instantly it took me back to that night on shipboard, when I had stood in the bow with the same companion, little dreaming that he was soon to be my husband. We had been married now only about two

months. It seemed to me that I had lived a lifetime in that short period, there had been so many and such thrilling experiences. Already Ovie had faced and conquered death so many times. Even this morning held its problems, with a new and untried machine before us. For an instant I wished that we could be like ordinary mortals, in a quiet little home of our own, living a natural, normal existence, instead of always being in the very jaws of death.

By this time we had reached our hangar and found the mechanics waiting for us. They had already wheeled the spotless new machine out into the mist.

"I'll just make a few hops," Ovie observed carelessly. "No sense in going up very high in a plane that's not been proved."

After inspecting every strut and wire in the machine, as well as the wings and motor, he climbed into the seat and gave the signal to start. I had become fairly used to seeing him fly away in his monoplane, and had grown to feel a confidence in his old Dragonfly, but it seemed strange to see him leave the earth in something else. It reminded me of the Belmont Park days when he made his first flights and I had my first fears. It seemed as though I had

to learn all over again how to be an aviator's wife.

The sun had now broken through the mist so that I could follow Ovie's movements. The monoplane staggered across the field. The reeling gait showed me that something was wrong, but as long as the machine stayed on the ground I did not worry. When it began to rise, though, swaying drunkenly from side to side, I became really anxious. It had not gone very far nor very high, when up came its tail and the airplane went plunging down head first. I can still see that tail, silhouetted black against the sky. The machine turned a complete somersault at the far end of the field and landed on its back.

Captain Baldwin, and the owner of the airplane, had come over from a neighbouring aerodrome. They rushed me into the Captain's auto and we tore across the field. It seemed the longest ride I had ever taken. Fifteen, twenty, thirty seconds, and no sign of Ovie! I knew that if he were alive and able to move he would make some motion to reassure me. If he had been thrown out as the machine went over, he would have been lying on the ground in plain sight. I decided that he must have prac-

tised what he always preached and stuck to the machine.

When we stopped beside the plane I came as near fainting as I ever did in my life. There lay Ovie, pinned beneath the monoplane, his face resting in a pool of blood. One of the horizontal bars of the landing chassis was pressing down upon his back so that he couldn't move. When they raised the machine and drew Ovie carefully out from under it, I was afraid to look. There was no telling how terribly he might be injured. He might even be—I couldn't look.

Imagine my relief when Ovie jumped to his feet and said cheerfully, "My, but I thought you people would never get here!" There he stood, none the worse for the experience except for a nose bleed. "Great stunt of mine, sticking to the machine! Wouldn't I have had a nice little sail through the air if that somersault had thrown me out! Say, old man, I'm sorry about your bus. The control stuck, and when I used force it gave way and went over too far."

When Glenn Curtis heard of the accident he sent Ovie a telegram, "Beware of strange machines." But it did no good.

Ovie didn't seem to appreciate in the least

what a narrow escape he had had, nor what a scare he had given us. Evidently he regarded the whole thing as an interesting scientific experiment. What would you do with a man like that?

CHAPTER XI

THE DRAGONFLY'S DOUBLE

OVIE always did have an imagination. I had not been married long before I discovered that he was a dreamer.

He loves to dream dreams, but he is also practical enough to put a foundation under his dreams and make them come true. So, one day, when Governor Woodruff was looking for someone to carry the first U. S. aerial mail, Ovie became immediately interested.

"Is this the first time it has ever been carried in America?" he asked eagerly.

"The very first," Governor Woodruff assured him.

Then Ovie's imagination began to work. He looked ahead several years and could see aerial mail routes established all over the country. He knew when that time came that he would like to remember that he had been the pioneer of them all—the very first postman to cut a pathway through the air.

So Ovie offered his services and had the honour of being the first U. S. aerial mail carrier. To make his title absolutely secure,

Postmaster-General Hitchcock in person swore him in "to support the Constitution of the United States, defend the mails," etc.

For days he carried a big seventy-five-pound bag of letters from Nassau Boulevard to Mineola. This was not so easy as it sounds, because he had to balance the bag on his knees while he was steering with his feet, and could only peep over it for an occasional glimpse at the wobbly horizon.

The postmaster at Mineola used to stand in the centre of the field and wave a red flag. When Ovie got five hundred feet above him, he aimed at the waiting official and dropped the bag, which always broke and scattered the letters far and wide. This seemed to me a funny way of "defending the mails," but Ovie said that it was necessary, as he did not dare make a landing with the bag on his knees. The envelopes bearing the postmark, "U. S. Aerial Mail Station No. 1" afterward brought five dollars a piece.

Every one present wanted to send a letter or post card by Ovie when he left the aerodrome with his first bag of aerial mail. A post office had been established in a tent on the field, and there was a sudden rush for stamps and postals.

The large leather mail bag was filled to bursting and was handed up to the aerial mail carrier. The airplane was started, and with a feeling that we were watching history in the making, we saw it rise, and disappear in the distance.

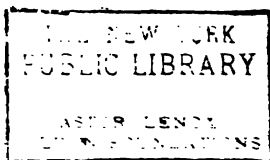
A few minutes later, an airplane exactly like our Bleriot, even to the figure 13 on its tail, arose from in front of the hangars, lurching drunkenly. I immediately recognized the monoplane as a copy of the Dragonfly which had been made for the transcontinental flight that Ovie was planning. I thought it strange for the machine to be in the air, as I felt sure that no one had been authorized to take it out. Even if I had not known that Ovie was miles away, I would have realized instantly that he was not the aviator at the wheel of the unsteady craft.

Only those immediately in front of the hangars noticed the plane leave the ground, as the attention of the spectators was concentrated on a bomb-throwing contest in progress at the time. As soon as the monoplane was well in the air, however, word went round that Ovie had returned from his first trip with the mail.

Around the aerodrome, still rising, came this craft numbered 13, which almost every one ex-



Postmaster-General Hitchcock in person swore him
in "to support the Constitution and defend the
mails"



cept me thought was the machine they had seen leave the field a few minutes before with Earle Ovington, the first official mail carrier.

The airplane rose higher and higher, and in turning one of the pylons—the posts set out to mark the course—the aviator banked the machine sharply, while trying to climb at the same time. Now any one who understands even the rudiments of flying knows that this should never be done. In turning, where steep banking is required, the aviator should either keep his machine on an even keel, or else allow it to descend slightly. Every aviator on the field who saw the attempt must have been surprised that one of Ovie's experience should try such a foolhardy undertaking.

Suddenly the machine tipped far over in the deadly side-slip. Down it shot, wholly out of control. Within two hundred feet of the ground it swung round and made a straight nose dive. With a loud crash of splintering wood, above which we could hear a cry of agony, the thousand pound airplane and its pilot struck the ground near the grand-stand. We knew that the aviator must be dead. No machine could have struck like that without instantly killing the man at the controls.

Standing up prominently from the wreckage was the tail, and on it, in large black figures, 13.

"It's Ovington!" passed like wildfire from one mouth to another, as officials and newspaper men made a dash for the scene of the accident.

So great was the shock to me that I didn't for moment grasp the difference between my viewpoint and that of the other spectators. I knew it wasn't Ovie, and yet practically everyone else at the meet thought it was.

Women rushed to me with tears in their eyes and tried to console me for my loss. One woman was almost in hysterics.

Governor Woodruff's sister was the first to reach me, and putting her arms about me said in a shaky voice, "My poor child, come with me."

"But it isn't Ovie," I protested.

She must have thought the shock had unhinged my mind.

"Really it isn't," I insisted. "He left the field ten minutes ago and has not yet returned. I saw this machine leave the hangars not three minutes before the accident. It isn't Ovie's Dragonfly at all, I tell you, but one of the Ameri-

can imitations made for him to use in his flight across the continent."

The news spread, and it was soon found that the unfortunate man was a novice named Clark, who had not yet received his pilot's license. He had been allowed to take the machine out on a misunderstanding. Clark originated the hair-raising circus performance of riding a motorcycle inside an iron cage, and seemed to think that because he had nerve for that feat, he was qualified to fly. He did not realize that while good nerve is necessary in a successful aviator, judgment and discretion are equally essential.

"Poor fellow," said a reporter, "he did come down hard. I've just been looking at the dents that his teeth made in the brass gasoline tank."

Suddenly we heard the roar of a motor above our heads, and looked up to see the Dragonfly.

Ovie landed without knowing what had happened, and naturally was surprised to find himself the centre of an excited group. They patted him on the back and wrung his hands as they told him how glad they were that he was still alive. He couldn't grasp the situation. Of course he was alive. Why shouldn't he be?

"What are you fellows giving me?" he finally asked.

They told him of the smash. Then of poor Clark's death, and how everybody thought it was his own. He looked over to the edge of the crowd where I was standing. "Did you think so too?" his eyes asked anxiously. I shook my head and he looked relieved. I could almost hear him mutter "Thank the Lord!" Then somebody slapped him on the back. "Gee, Ovington, but I'm glad you're alive!"

"So am I," said Ovie with equal enthusiasm. "And I'm glad the rest of you feel the same way about it. It's darn nice of you."

Wherever we went that day he was welcomed as one just back from the dead. It began to get on my nerves.

"You will be careful, won't you, dear?" I begged.

"Always am, girl," he answered indifferently. "Too bad about poor old Clark."

CHAPTER XII

THE FLIGHT THAT FAILED

ALL our time now was spent in getting ready for the transcontinental flight. Hearst had offered fifty thousand dollars to the first man to fly from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Ovie, of course, meant to be that man. There were ten others who had similar expectations, but so far we had not heard of any one's starting. A manager was engaged, a private train arranged for, and two extra mechanics added to our staff, making five in all.

Naturally, Ovie would have preferred using his old reliable Dragonfly, but he couldn't get the extra parts for it in time because it was a French machine. On a long trip like that he would have to be prepared for a good many smashes, as there was no telling where he would have to land. If his engine stopped he was just as likely as not to come down in a tree. So, when an American manufacturer offered to supply him with a copy of the Dragonfly and enough spare parts to make two machines, he accepted the proposition. Another firm placed

the necessary engines at his disposal. These engines were copies of his Gnome, and the monoplane was supposed to be a duplicate of his Bleriot.

I felt as though he had turned traitor to the Dragonfly, and I am sure he had more than one regret himself when the American imitation appeared. It lacked the fine workmanship and finish of the French machine. A casual observer might not be able to tell it from the Dragonfly, but any one who knew the least thing about airplanes—even an aviator's wife—could see the difference at once. And from the first, Alfred had no confidence in the engine and would have nothing to do with it.

When an airplane is being made ready for an important event, the mechanics go about their work as though they were grooming down a race horse. But all that I had ever seen them do before was as nothing to the way they toiled now. From early morning until late at night they were hovering over the machine. They made the smallest changes with the minutest care, sometimes taking hours over the proper adjustment of a single wire. I thought that I had already spent a large part of my time among the airplanes, but we fairly lived in the

hangar now, arriving soon after the mechanics and never leaving until they snapped the lock on the door.

So long as Ovie had decided to undertake the coast-to-coast trip I gave him only encouragement. But I had many misgivings. I dreaded the thought of seeing him go off each morning never knowing where he would land, and not being there to see what happened to him when he did. His plan was to keep going until his power gave out. When his fuel tank was empty he would have to come down, wherever he happened to be. It would be different from anything he had ever done before. Often I felt tempted to speak to him about it, but determined not to put more obstacles in his way than were already there.

I was to follow Ovie's airplane in our special train, with the manager, five mechanics, a moving-picture man, a post-card photographer, and several reporters. At first I hoped that I would be able to keep his monoplane in sight most of the way, and even travel beneath it. But I gave up the idea when I realized that it would be impossible for the fastest train to keep up with an airplane. I began to dread the trip more than ever. I could see myself sitting at the

window looking out at the fleeting landscape and wondering about Ovie. Hour after hour would pass in the same uncertainty. At evening I might receive a telegram, announcing, perhaps, that he had smashed. My heart failed me as I imagined a whole month of such days of anxiety stretching before me. But I have always been glad that I said nothing.

When the plane was wheeled from the hangar it looked as new and dazzling as the Dragonfly in its prime. But when the machine took the air I could see that something was wrong. The tail was much lower than it should have been, and the motor didn't sound like our big Gnome. As the tail dropped lower and lower the plane swayed in a drunken fashion. Then the nose pointed downward, headed straight for earth. We could see, even from where we were, that the landing was a bad "pancake."

We were not long in getting there, as we had only a short distance to go. I knew at once, by the way Ovie jumped from the machine, that he had not been hurt. "What was the matter?" we all wanted to know.

"Looks as if she were too heavy," Ovie replied. "That's the trouble with American manufacturers when they copy foreign ma-

chines. They 'improve' the planes which they try to imitate until they won't leave the ground, and if they do go up they are poor flyers. But this airplane may not be properly adjusted. I'll give it the benefit of the doubt. We are going to try raising the tail a little more, and that may make some difference."

The next day the tail was raised, then it was lowered, then a happy medium between the two was tried, but the machine would not fly any better than before. It would start up as though it were going to the clouds, but when fifty feet in the air would drop heavily to earth. The engine heated because it was over-loaded.

At each attempt we thought the airplane had been properly adjusted and was at last ready for the trip. Each morning I packed our suitcases—the trunks were on board the special train—getting ready for the start which we expected to make before dark. And every evening I unpacked our luggage again, taking out just enough things to last us one more night.

An amusing article appeared about this time in one of the papers, though I didn't think it funny then. Ovie said, "It was certainly one on us." It was headed:

"Ovington Soars, then Alights for the Thirteenth Time," and went on to say:

"Earle Ovington is aviating in the direction of the Pacific coast at a speed that would make a snail giddy with envy. The last bulletin received today from the Nassau aerodrome announced that he had made thirteen starts, kissing his wife good-bye thirteen times, and that she would no sooner get her handkerchief out for a gentle little cry than down Ovie would come for another kiss and another start.

"While admitting his devotion for his bride, the young birdman denied that he had come down because he couldn't bear to go ahead without just one more kiss. It was the engine's fault entirely, he said, or if it was not the engine, it was the propeller or one of the wings, or a tail feather, or something of the sort.

"Bulletin number 683 dealing with Ovington's coast-to-coast flight, announced that he and an entire staff of monoplane surgeons were at work, but had failed to diagnose the malady. On the ground everything would go beautifully, but once the machine was up it instantly contracted asthma, croup, or carbureter laryngitis.

"When he took the air on his thirteenth start, Ovington thought his magic number might lift

the 'hoodoo' that seems to have settled on all aerial transcontinental tourists who have been going up and coming down for the past month.

" 'Thirteen is my lucky number,' he said, then he jumped aboard his chariot and soared skyward—but he didn't soar long. He volplaned to earth within a few rods of where he started.

" 'That "hoodoo" sticks closer than a lampry cel,' he said gloomily. Then he whistled to his little bunch of mechanics. According to last accounts they were performing an operation for monoplane appendicitis."

The time for starting the contest closed next day, and still the machine was not ready. Ovie realized that immediate action was necessary and told me that he must leave that afternoon for Governor's Island, so as to make an early start from there the following morning.

The airplane had been made much lighter and a new motor had been installed, which we felt would probably overcome the difficulties. About three o'clock the machine was wheeled out for its final start, and Ovie took his place at the controls more confidently than he had for several days.

Alfred turned the propeller and Ovie gave the

men at the tail the signal to let go. To avoid the expected onrush of the machine Alfred jumped out of the way, but he needn't have been in such a hurry, for it would not budge, even on the ground. The engine had to be taken all to pieces and then put together again—the work of several hours. But Ovie still had hopes of getting off before night.

Hour after hour I sat in our little runabout, waiting. The sun sank low in the western sky and disappeared, but the airplane did not seem any nearer ready than it had been before. We went home to dinner and came back to the field after dark, bringing a big china wash-pitcher of coffee, some beefsteak, and bread and butter, which the mechanics stopped long enough to eat, then hurried back to their work.

It was midnight before the airplane was finally pronounced ready, and my heart almost stopped beating when Ovie announced that he intended to start at once, by moonlight. To be sure, the moon was full and round and big, but not big enough for such a trip. I knew that it would be worse than useless to say anything, so I kept still. But one of the newspaper boys, who had been waiting for hours for the start, did his best to persuade Ovie not to take the

risk. I think he really would have made the attempt, though, if the moon had not suddenly gone under a cloud. As it was, we went back to the Aviary—where I was beginning to be ashamed to show my face, having said good-bye so many times—to get what sleep we could before the early start the following morning.

Next day we found ourselves more than ever in the public eye. A moving-picture man arrived and ground out pictures of us from the moment we sat down to breakfast until the actual start was made. It was anything but pleasant to eat our usually quiet meal with that continual grind, grind, grind, recording every bite we took. The little camera man photographed us as we set off for the field in the car, and made a running jump onto the step in order to go with us and be on hand so that he could get a picture of our arrival.

Gifts again poured in on my aviator husband: three first-aid outfits for use in case of a smash; three thermos bottles for hot, cold, or medium drinkables; a five pound box of chewing gum, which we never chewed; a thousand cigarettes, which we never smoked; and several cases of champagne, which we never had a chance to drink.

One concern gave Ovie a lifebelt, and this he really could use. It was similar to the inner tube of a tire. A shoe factory offered to supply him with all the footgear he could wear on the trip, which sounded munificent, but, after all, Ovie had only two feet, and flying is not hard on one's shoes.

The novelty of saying good-bye had begun to wear off, so our farewells were brief. One of the thermos bottles had been filled with hot soup, and a lunch box packed with sandwiches enough to feed six hungry men. I strapped them to the fuselage myself, so that I could feel sure that, no matter how far from civilization my husband might land, he would be in no immediate danger of starvation. I had not been married long enough to know that Ovie hated sandwiches.

The steam was up in the special train, which I had already stocked with enough groceries to last twenty people a month. All was in readiness. A large number of spectators gathered to see the start, while a group of reporters took down every word that Ovie uttered. The moving-picture man focussed his camera on the hangar ready to grind off pictures as soon as the airplane was wheeled out.

Ovie got into his aviation togs and bound the lifebelt around his waist. A crowd of enthusiasts swarmed about him, some of them slipping letters into his hands to be delivered when he reached the Pacific coast. I could not get as near as I would have liked because of the merciless camera, but I got as near as I could.

Ovie came to me at the edge of the crowd, where there was no chance for the movie man to record our final leave taking. Alfred spun the propeller and the engine roared out its readiness in a way it never had before. The machine rolled across the grass and in a few seconds was in the air, rising like the Dragonfly itself.

It had not gone far, however, before I noticed an unsteadiness, and the tail dropped lower and lower. All too well I knew the symptoms of an overheated engine. The dropping tail meant just one thing—the beginning of the end. A moment later Ovie had come down to earth with a crash.

We hurried over in an automobile. There he sat, still strapped to his seat, which was now on the ground. The entire landing chassis had crumbled beneath him. He was calmly engaged in unscrewing his favourite altimeter from the

instrument board. As usual he was philosophical.

“Well, I’ve done all I can to make this combination fly. But the Lord never meant it to stay in the air, and far be it from me to dispute the matter any longer.”

CHAPTER XIII

BROKEN WINGS

I HAVE now come to a part of our history which I wish it were not necessary to write. Although the big Chicago meet was unquestionably the most successful aviation venture ever held in this country, the time was so filled with dread and anxiety for me that I would like to pass over the whole period as though it had never been. Of the thirty-six aviators who flew at Chicago, only five are living today. To be sure, they were not all killed there, but death, or the fear of death, was always present—the competition was so fierce.

The meet was a great success because there were so many machines in the air at once, and because there were so many accidents. You could never look up without seeing at least a dozen airplanes floating around at various heights, so that they appeared to be of different sizes. At the very top would be a tiny black speck, which seemed to be standing still except that now and then it dived into the clouds. Below it, a butterfly spread its wings against

the sky; and below the butterfly soared a small white bird. Still lower was a very diminutive airplane; then one which had grown a bit larger; another larger still; and finally a full-sized machine raced round the course, not twenty feet above the ground.

The biplanes of the heavier type went up for endurance—length of time in the air—and would slowly soar for hours above the field, ignoring the events which took place down in the lower air.

The meet was on for twelve days. If it had lasted any longer it would have outlasted me. Perhaps, if I had been a spectator from the grand-stand instead of one from the hangars, I might have enjoyed it, as the races were the most thrilling I had ever seen. But because I happened to be an aviator's wife, my nerves were tense every minute.

At the end of each day's flying I was an absolute wreck, and Ovie himself was almost as worn-out as I. When night came we would go back to the hotel, only a few steps from the aerodrome, almost too tired to eat the light supper which was served in our rooms. Tumbling into bed, we would sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion.

The Chicago meet was the first in America to introduce racing in the air. Up to that time people had been satisfied with mere exhibition flying. Men had flown against time, but had never flown against each other. There were two classes of races at this meet, one for monoplanes and the other for biplanes.

As the first race to be held was for monoplanes, Ovie took part.

When the starting bomb shot into the air three machines were wheeled to the line. The contestants—Tom Sopwith, who had replaced the defunct Family Bus with a monoplane; René Simon, and Ovie—all flew French Bleriot, though the flyers themselves represented three different countries, England, France, and America.

It would have been dangerous to start the competitors all at once, so they took the air at intervals of twenty seconds, Tom Sopwith first, René Simon second, and Ovie last.

The race was twenty laps, each lap being a mile. At first the contestants found it difficult to turn the sharp corners at each end of the elongated track. The airplanes had to be steeply banked—tipped up on their sides. There was always the danger of their being

banked too far and falling into the deadly side-slip. René Simon, an expert aerodrome flyer from France, at first took the corners better than either Tom or Ovie. But before long they got the knack, and the fight was on.

Round and round the course the three racers tore, each birdman making the turns sharper and sharper. Could Ovie, the last to start, hope to shorten the gap that separated him from the others? Every time he passed the pylon nearest me I tried to measure the distance. He was gaining! Slowly but surely the gap grew less. More and more steeply he banked on the turns, and more and more deftly he straightened his machine for the stretches. Not an inch did he waste.

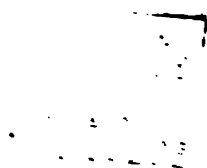
I heard a bystander say, "That thirteen boy ain't leavin' much paint on them pylons!"

At the ninth lap Ovie had overtaken the little Frenchman and was hard after the flying Englishman. Tom, realizing the international character of the race, fought every bit of the way, and I could tell by Ovie's reckless flying that he would not let the Stars and Stripes drag in the dust if he could help it.

Dear old Alfred stood close beside me during the whole race, and not for an instant did he



More and more steeply he banked on the turns



remove his eyes from the Dragonfly. With clenched fists, he noted with the eye of an expert technical details and niceties of manipulation which escaped the rest of us. Now and then he would mutter to himself: "Ah, ze *monsieur*, he iss ze born *aviateur*! Careful, careful, *monsieur*, not too much on ze bank! *Très bien. Ah, magnifique!*"

At the eighteenth lap the Dragonfly's nose passed the tail of Sopwith's plane. At the grand-stand on the nineteenth lap they were abreast. A mighty shout went up from thousands of throats whose excited owners forgot that the drivers of those flying demons were deafened by a roar louder than Niagara. I could have screamed with delight when I saw Ovie in the last lap gaining inch by inch on his rival. He had been flying higher than the others and now I realized why—at the finish he would coast down and thus gain additional velocity.

When the two foremost planes came round the homestretch with their big engines roaring at highest speed, and their drivers crouching tensely behind the levers, he was only half a dozen feet in the lead, but at least twenty-five feet higher than Tom. Within a few hundred

feet of the grand-stand Ovie pointed the Dragonfly's nose for the ground and, keeping on full power, flashed across the finish line—the winner!

"*Ah, c'est comme j'ai pensé, madame. A tousan' dolar for monsieur in less zan twenty minute!*" Alfred beamed with joy.

A moment later Ovie came striding over to the hangar. "Say, Dell, but that's the king of sports!" he exulted. "I've been in all kinds of races—foot, boat, bicycle, motorcycle, and automobile—but, believe me, this chasing round a small aerodrome and banking at eighty degrees makes all the rest look like a Sunday-school picnic."

The races I dreaded most, however, were those to the Crib and back. The Crib was a pile of rocks three miles out in the lake, and the contestants wore life-preservers so as to be prepared for accidents. A Curtiss flyer named Robinson, who flew a hydro-airplane, spent most of his time picking wet aviators out of the lake. If a machine was not back a few minutes after it started we always knew what had happened. It seemed to me that whenever the day came for a race to the Crib the wind was blowing a gale. Time after time Ovie came back high and dry,

but I never felt sure of his safety until I saw the Dragonfly winging its way homeward. I had learned to recognize it at a distance, for there was something in the poise of its wings that distinguished it from all other airplanes.

One day it was so windy that no one would go up but Ovie, who decided to risk it. He had to fight every minute against the gale and was tossed about like a ship at sea. The Dragonfly climbed unsteadily into the air and sailed out of sight over the lake. I wondered if the time would ever come when I could look at Ovie and feel that he was safe—as safe, at least, as other men. Nothing in the world mattered to me but his safety, and that was the one thing which mattered least to him. His exhibition of foolhardiness was witnessed by one of the largest crowds of the meet, and as he came back out of the misty clouds the people gave him a rousing welcome.

Sometimes, as I sat there alone in the hangar, I used to wonder if it were really I! It would be hard to imagine a greater contrast than existed between my present life compared with the quiet of my Virginia home. There, one day followed another in lazy monotony, and practically the only changes were those of the seasons.

Had it not been for Ovie I would still be in that quaint old corner of the world, away from this nerve-racking existence, leading the same peaceful life that I did before I went to Paris. But —there *was* Ovie.

What always threw a damper on things for me was the ambulance gliding noiselessly about the field with a doctor and trained nurse aboard, and bandages and ointment ready for the worst. But even more busy than the ambulance was the motor truck provided for hauling wrecked machines back to their hangars.

The number of smashes at the Chicago meet was really appalling. They varied from the mere breaking of a strut or wire to the demolishing of a whole airplane. One very spectacular accident occurred when McCurdy ran his machine into some electric light wires. These short-circuited on his fuel tank and the gasoline exploded, setting fire to the airplane. The Dragonfly was in the air at the time, and circled round its companion like a bird over its wounded mate. By some miracle McCurdy managed to land and escaped unhurt. But the machine, which a few minutes before had been soaring above our heads as white and pretty as any of



There was something in the poise of its wings that distinguished it from all
other airplanes

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them, was soon nothing but a mass of charred wood and twisted metal.

There was a hush upon the aviation field. Badger had been killed. The ambulance had just taken his remains to the hospital. The tangled wreckage of his machine lay in a heap on the ground. We had grown so accustomed to seeing accidents without any serious results, that we could hardly grasp what had happened.

Poor little Badger! Death seemed farther removed from him than from any of the other flyers. He was so young and cheerful, always with a smile on his boyish face as he sailed round the course in his Red Devil. He was one of Captain Baldwin's pupils and had taken his pilot's license the previous week.

A few minutes before the accident Ovie and I were standing in front of our hangar talking to a reporter. We were watching the machines, when suddenly among all the white ones came a streak of crimson, and little Badger went flashing by in his Red Devil. He was a reckless driver, but chiefly through inexperience—he did not realize how little strain his machine would stand. As he passed our hangar we saw him

swoop to earth, then rise again at an abrupt angle. He was doing the Dutch Roll with a steep descent, sharp rise, and with the power full on. Now that is one of the most dangerous things that can be done—in fact, every experienced aviator knows that it is nothing less than court-
ing death.

Badger had circled the field and was back again. Having succeeded so well with his spectacular dip, he decided to make it even steeper, and I trembled to see how sharply he tilted his machine toward the earth. Ovie turned to the reporter with the brief comment, “Some day that boy will get his!”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the crash came. The airplane was a mass of kindling, and the boy lay limp and quiet, face down amidst the wreckage. Ovie, who was the first to reach his side, lifted him carefully in his arms and laid him on the grass. With one moan the lad took his last flight.

Not content with one victim, death visited our field again within the hour. Those who happened to be looking at the lake saw a monoplane poise a thousand feet above it, then shoot downward. There was a splash, and all was over. A cry broke from the audience. Every one

knew that this was not a mere ducking. No human being could have struck the water with such force and have an atom of life left.

Word went round that it was Johnston. His poor, distracted little wife rushed from one official to another with anxious questions. Somebody assured her that her husband was quite safe—that he had been picked up by a boat. You could see that she was doing her best to believe it. There had been so many dives into the lake, and so far every aviator had been saved. But when she found herself surrounded by newspaper men with cameras, she knew that something must be wrong. Seven of the black boxes were focussed on her. An official told her the truth and her expression of apprehension changed to one of horror. At that moment the seven cameras clicked.

Although the first fatality had occurred almost directly in front of the grandstand, and the second in plain sight, the spectators, after the momentary shock of surprise and fear, were soon as interested as ever in the machines which continued to circle the course. Indeed, I couldn't help feeling that their appetites had even been whetted by the excitement, and that they were eager for more. Sophisticated Amer-

icans though they were, at that moment they seemed little better than the audience in a Mexican bull ring. I wonder if the processes of evolution will ever wipe out our primitive longing to witness suffering and death.

CHAPTER XIV

DUCKED!

THERE came a time when the engine of the Dragonfly had to be taken out of the machine and overhauled. On that same day a five-mile race to the South Shore Country Club was called, and Ovie had nothing to fly. But his luck still held, at least, we thought it was luck then. An aviator who had learned to fly with him at Pau had a brand-new Bleriot which he wanted Ovie to test. The machine was like the Dragonfly except that it had a fifty-horse-power engine instead of a seventy, carried two passengers instead of one, and was marked ten instead of thirteen.

One of the newspaper men wanted Ovie to release some carrier pigeons during his flight, an experiment never before attempted. The birds, with notes tied to their feet, were shut in a basket, which Ovie fastened behind his seat before he started. This feature of the flight was to be kept secret, and when the other reporters asked what was in the basket Ovie

laughed and told them it was his dinner. They joked about his appetite and said he must be planning to land on a desert island.

The race was called and one machine after another started out. Then Ovie's turn came. Except for the number on the tail of the monoplane it looked like his own Bleriot. But when it left the ground I saw the difference. Being a two-passenger machine and carrying only one, it was not so well balanced as the Dragonfly, and I missed the reliable roar of Ovie's more powerful Gnome.

No sooner did he get up than he had engine trouble and had to come down again for another start, a thing that had never happened in the Dragonfly. I think he expected something to go wrong. Before he went up again he told me not to worry if he was slow in getting back, as he might have to land. He got off at last and I watched him out of sight.

One by one the machines returned, until it was time for Ovie. With field glasses I tried to distinguish him on the horizon; but minutes passed and nothing appeared. I waited so long that it seemed folly to wait any longer, and yet what else was there to do? I could only wait and watch and hope. At last, even hope died



I watched him out of sight

NEW YORK
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1-1-41

out, and I hurried to the telephone booth at headquarters, knowing that if Ovie had landed he would send me a message as soon as possible. Sure enough, an official told me of his landing on a lawn near the clubhouse. He had sent word not to worry, that he was all right.

At first I was satisfied, almost, until I realized that I hadn't heard his voice myself. They had told Mrs. Johnston, too, that her husband was safe, even while they were removing his body from the lake. I determined to call up the clubhouse myself and try to speak to Ovie.

So eager was I to get to a 'phone that I thought of nothing else, and was startled when some one spoke to me. I looked up to find a newspaper man focusing his camera on my face.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Ovington, we want to take your picture."

Then cameras sprang up all about me, and suddenly I found myself the centre of the same group which had crowded about poor Mrs. Johnston. Did they think that Ovie would not come back, and did they want my picture for the same reason that they had wanted hers? I felt faint and sick at first, and weak in the knees. Then a wave of anger swept away my fear and I turned furiously at bay.

"Don't you dare take my picture! I know why you want it, but you are wrong. Mr. Ovington is safe, I'm sure he is." I doubt whether they believed me, but, anyway, not a single camera clicked.

I ran all the way to the hotel and called up the clubhouse. When they said they would call Ovie I nearly wept for joy. Then I heard his dear old reassuring voice again.

"That you, Dell? Yes, girl, I'm all right, but pretty wet. Yep, got a ducking in the lake—bottom side up with care. Fellows want me to stay to dinner. Don't mind, do you? I'm awfully hungry."

Mind! As if I could mind anything after that! I skipped up to my room and had a little hallelujah party all by myself.

Late that night a strange man in a hunting costume, with a bundle swung over his shoulder on a stick, strolled into my room and woke me out of a sound sleep.

"Don't you know your own husband?" he asked in a grieved voice.

"What's in that bundle?"

"Clothes—mine. Gee, but they're wet!" While he was festooning them about the furniture to dry, he told me what had happened.

"That motor never did act right from the start," he grumbled. "Slowed down several times. I thought it might fail any minute, so I got up as high as I could."

"What did you do that for?"

"So I'd have a wide choice of landing places. I kept well out over the water, too. You've no idea what a mixture of whirlpools and wind eddies there are over those Chicago skyscrapers."

He got his old calabash off the mantel and, dropping into a chair, began to smoke.

I threw a pillow at him. "Go on, talk!"

He put the pillow behind his head and stretched his feet out with a sigh of contentment. "Where was I? Oh, then, when I was about two thousand feet up that half-baked Gnome went dead. Of course there was only one thing to do—"

"Go down," I said.

"Say, you're getting to be some aviator!" he chuckled. "Funny, but you know the first thing I thought of when that engine croaked?"

"Me?" I asked hopefully.

"Not this time, girly. Don't get jealous. It was those poor little pigeons shut in the basket behind me. If I fell in the water they'd be

drowned, and if I smashed on the land they'd be killed. The way I doped it out, the air was the worst place for me, but it was the safest place for them. I managed to steer with one hand and unfasten the cover of the basket with the other."

"Oh, I'm glad you thought of them! Did they fly out?"

"Not right then. I fell into a bad-slip, and forgot all about them, trying to get the machine back where it belonged. I decided I'd better pay a little attention to my own safety, for my girl's sake."

"About time you thought of me."

"Darling, don't I always think of you? Well, I found I was going to fall in the water and made my plans accordingly. We're not very well acquainted yet, so you may not know that your husband is as much at home in the water as on it; the idea of a ducking didn't bother me. I knew that in a Bleriot the weight is so far forward, that the machine would turn a somersault the minute the landing wheels struck the water. The safest thing was to stick to the plane and let it take the shock of landing. If I let myself be thrown out I'd either be tangled in the wires and drowned as Johnston was, or

hurt by striking the propeller. I didn't unstrap my safety belt until I was within thirty feet of the lake."

"When you didn't come back the photographers tried to take my picture," I faltered.

Ovie hauled himself out of the chair, and removing his pipe came over and sat on the side of the bed.

"The good die young, and I'm still here," was all he said. But he gave my hand a little squeeze, and I knew he understood.

"Please go on and tell me the rest."

"Just before I hit the water I let go the controlling lever, and grabbed the seat with both hands. Barely had time to take a deep breath when over I went like a flash, still sitting in the seat but with the machine on top of me. Say, do you know I wasn't the least bit excited! I opened my eyes and saw the yellow fuselage of my plane floating on the water—it floats like a cork, you know, because of the air between the wing surfaces. There were some wires in front of me, and I pulled myself between them and got clear of the machine and bobbed up to the surface. Remember, I'd wound the inner tube of a motor cycle tire round me before I left, and it proved a good life preserver."

"My, but I'm glad I made you put it on!"

"Just as if I couldn't swim! Pretty soon I climbed up on top of the airplane and sat astride the fuselage. I was only five hundred feet from shore, and I could see the people running up and down the beach, shouting, and waving their arms. A couple of men started out in a small boat to get me, but as the boat had only one oar they kept going in a circle. When I landed, everybody came crowding up, cheering and wringing my hand, though I must say my clothes needed it more. I called for volunteers to go into the water and bring the airplane ashore, and got all I wanted. It took us only a few minutes to turn the big machine over and carry it way up the beach. A lot of boys were scampering round as if a circus had just come to town. One of them ran up and cried, 'Say, mister, when your machine struck de water I seen a couple of boids flop out.' "

"Good! Those pigeons; they were saved after all," I said.

"By George, but they are a bunch of good fellows at that club! Everybody gave me the glad hand, from the president to the janitor. Even the chef had to come in and shake hands with me before he'd give me anything to eat

—and I was hungry enough to eat an ossified cab horse. But he certainly gave me one swell feed, after they'd dressed me up in the stray clothes from some of the lockers. Lucky it wasn't a women's club," he mused.

"Yes, wasn't it?" I agreed. "Now," I added, "I hope you'll be satisfied to keep to your own machine."

My incorrigible husband got up and stretched himself. "I'm not so sure about that. All the fun I've ever had has been in the other fellow's plane."

CHAPTER XV

OVER THREE STATES—AND HOME!

AND now comes the day of the great tri-state race, a day that was to be unlike any I had ever lived through before. I was to watch Ovie sail away out of my sight, knowing that he would be far above the clouds for hours and that I could only follow him on the map.

More perfect weather for an airplane race could not have been ordered, for no one would have known how to improve it. The sky was deep blue, clear as crystal, with a few light clouds. There was the tang of early September in the air, a hint of the coming fall.

Long before noon, the time which had been set for the start, the largest crowd that had ever gathered on the aerodrome at Squantum packed the grand-stand and overflowed into the bleachers. The surrounding country was fairly black with people, and even the harbour was speckled with heavily laden boats. I was told that over in Boston the roofs were covered with men,

women, and children, all with eyes turned toward the aviation field.

For this was to be the greatest cross-country race ever held in America, and, indeed one of the most notable events in the early history of aviation. The course was from Boston to Nashua, New Hampshire; to Worcester, Massachusetts; to Providence, Rhode Island; then home again to Boston—just a hundred and eighty-six miles as the crow flies. There were two divisions, one for monoplanes and one for biplanes. The prizes totaled seventeen thousand five hundred dollars, the prize for the winning monoplane being ten thousand.

There were less than a dozen flyers at the Squantum meet, but among them were Harry Atwood, Tom Sopwith, the reckless daredevil Beachy, who was later killed in California, and Eugene Ely, his pal, also killed shortly afterward during what he had intended to be his farewell flight. The English aviator, Grahame-White, was also there—a reserved, good-looking fellow whom none of us got to know very well.

Of these there were only four entrants to the race: Harry Atwood in his Burgess-Wright biplane, Lieut. T. D. Milling with a machine of

the same make, Arthur Stone in a Queen monoplane, and Earle Ovington in the Dragonfly. After going over the course in an automobile, the others, including Grahame-White, had decided that it was too risky, and refused to enter the contest.

Ovie was to be the first to start, and there was a hush as he put on his helmet, heavy coat, and life-preserver. My throat felt tense and my mouth dry. I realized suddenly that this was the beginning of the long journey which I had been dreading for days. It was almost more than I could bear. I wondered miserably why I had ever let things go so far. Never once had I tried to dissuade him. Now it was too late. Fate had already taken matters out of my hands.

Then Ovie came to me at the edge of the crowd and I knew there was still a chance to stop him. But when I saw his beaming face I hadn't the heart to try.

"Be brave, dear," he said, as he kissed me good-bye. "For," he added, enthusiasm burning in his eyes, "we're bound to win, girl!"

I managed to smile a little as he climbed into the machine. Then I saw Alfred spin the big propeller to start the engine.

The powerful Gnome sputtered till it got into its stride. Then it settled into the reassuring roar I had come to know so well. And dear old Alfred, who had spent the whole night before the race tuning up his pet, smiled and nodded approvingly.

“Ze moteur is pairfect, *monsieur*,” he said.

Amidst all the excitement of the start Ovie was easily the calmest person on the field. After listening a moment to the motor he examined the two little inverted glass cups of his oil indicator to be sure that the castor oil was circulating through the engine. His electric tachometer told him that the propeller was cutting the air at the rate of over fourteen hundred revolutions a minute. Then he moved the rudder bar with his feet, turning as he did so to see that the rudder obeyed its controls. He even cut off his ignition to prove that this emergency device was ready for instant action.

Giving me a last look, Ovie raised his hand. This was a signal to the men who were holding the Dragonfly to the ground against the pull of the powerful engine and rapidly revolving propeller. With one accord they let go and the monoplane leaped forward. After rolling across the field for about a hundred yards it

rose into the air. Ovie waved a joyous farewell as he went skyward, and the great crowd answered with a resounding cheer. I realized that the trial had come.

I swallowed hard and tried to choke back the tears. What would the day bring forth? I had visions of disaster and of forced landings in strange places. But I resolutely put aside my fears and determined at least to do my part by keeping up my courage.

One by one the other machines started, until they were all on their way.

The minute they were out of sight I took up my quarters in the small tent which served as a telegraph booth for official news about the contestants of the race.

People came and peered at me through the folds of the tent as though I were some queer caged animal. I must have been a strange, engrossed figure as I sat poring over a map of the course, tensely following every report that came over the wires. Sometimes a well-meaning individual would thrust his head inside the tent and ask:

"Worried, Mrs. Ovington?"

"Oh, no," I would reply, as lightly as I could, looking up only long enough to answer, for the

telegraph instrument was clicking all the time and I didn't want to miss a word that was coming over the wires. As fast as the message was taken down a man with a megaphone shouted it to the four corners of the great enclosure.

"Ovington is now flying over Lynn!" and everybody from Lynn would rise and shout at the honour that was being done their city. This big, friendly crowd was always ready to cheer over any bit of good news that came in. And you could feel their disappointment when word came that Atwood and Stone had dropped out of the race. The two flyers had had engine trouble. This left Ovie the only entrant in the monoplane class, for the other machine that was still flying, Lieutenant Milling's, was a biplane. So, instead of being a question of who would finish first, it became simply a question of who would finish at all.

Close on the heels of the report that Ovie had landed at Nashua, the first stop, came his message to me: "Landed in fine shape. Feeling bully. Motor best ever." No sooner had I flashed back the answer: "Good for you, Ovie. Keep it up," than I heard the megaphone man announcing the news to the people. How they

did cheer! Just as if he were there to hear them. Besides the reports every few minutes from the places over which he was flying, came my messages from Ovie himself from the three cities *en route*. So it was that the long afternoon was made endurable.

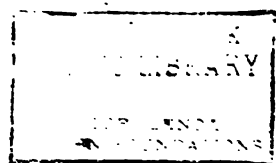
Only when I was sure that he was safe on solid earth at one or another of his landing places would I forsake my post for a minute. At such times I paced back and forth behind the tent, forever trying to get away from the fear that was gnawing at my heart. It isn't a pleasure to know that your husband is flying cross-country for a hundred and eighty-six miles in a tricky exhibition monoplane when you fully realize what may be his fate any minute.

After he left Nashua, Ovie continued on to Worcester and then to Providence, stopping at each point as required by the rules. At last the telegraph instrument told me that he had left Providence and was on his way to Boston. When the report came that he had been sighted from Blue Hill, a few miles from the field, I could scarcely contain myself for joy. A little while, and he would be home and safe!

I forsook the tent and ran out into the centre of the aerodrome. The Mayor of Boston gave



A speck appeared in the gathering darkness



me his field glasses and I held them to my straining eyes.

At last came the word that Ovie was above Blue Hill.

It was growing dark. The sun was trailing low in the western sky, painting the clouds with wonderful tones of red and orange.

A speck appeared in the gathering darkness.

A lone cry arose, "There he is!"

The crowd stood at the cry. The field was quiet. No one thought of cheering. With a feeling almost like awe, the people waited.

Way off, black against a cloud bank, was the speck. It grew larger and larger. I saw it through the mayor's fieldglasses, and smiled for the first time in hours.

"It's Ovie!" I cried.

An answering shout burst from twenty thousand throats, "It's Ovington!"

A moment later we could see the outline of a monoplane, sharp against the gathering gloom. It was the Dragonfly.

The mass of people, a moment before so still, was changed into a mob of yelling maniacs. They jumped up on the benches, and flung their hats into the air, waving their arms and cheering. Their shouts echoed back from the sur-

rounding hills, together with the din of honking auto horns and shrieking boat whistles. The bedlam they made must have reached the airman, even through the roar of his engine.

A few seconds later he shot across the finish line, then he alighted—and a hero was on the field. Hand in hand with the Mayor of Boston, I raced after the Bleriot. Behind us followed a shouting mob—reporters, aviators, officials, mechanics—all gone mad in the excitement of the moment.

Ovie barely had time to lean over and kiss me before he was lifted from the machine and borne off on the shoulders of his fellow aviators, ably assisted by the mayor. And pandemonium reigned.

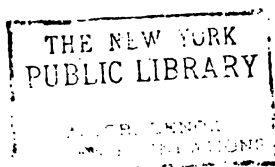
The strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" filled the air.

"Three cheers for Boston's aviator!" someone cried, and they were given with a will.

And all the time I kept as close to him as I could, wholly unmindful of the crush about me. Near the same spot, where, tense with apprehension I had stood a few minutes before, I now stood again, as though waking from a dream, to hear my husband cheered to the very echo by the enthusiastic multitude.



The bedlam they made must have reached the airman



For a long time the people sat waiting for news of Lieutenant Milling. It grew darker and darker. Twilight gave way to evening. The moon rose and cast a soft light over the aviation field. A bonfire was started so that its glare would guide the pilot home.

Off to the southwest appeared a little blot, barely discernible. As it came nearer and nearer, an indistinct blur against the dark background of the heavens, a shaft of moonlight flashed across the whirring propeller, and we knew it must be Milling.

Several red torches flared in the crowd. The stillness of the night was broken by the cry of a multitude welcoming an airman who had returned from a brave voyage. The glare of the bonfire lighted the biplane and every strut stood out against the darkness.

The machine had no sooner come to earth than it was surrounded by a frenzied mob striving to reach the other hero of the day. Ovie was the first to welcome him, and there beneath the light of the moon, whose mellow rays were broken by the glare of the bonfire and the torches of the crowd, the two stood silhouetted against the night.

It was the first moment we had been alone since the big race. We were in our cosy sitting-room at the Inn.

"Boy, dear," I whispered, "I'm so glad to have you back again!"

Ovie held me close.

"The world may not know it, girl, but it was you who won the race. It was the memory of your brave little smile that gave me the courage to meet the dangers as they came. Once I lost my way and thought I'd have to give up the flight."

"But you didn't," I cried. "Oh, I'm so glad you didn't!"

"I couldn't," he said simply. "I knew you'd be so disappointed."

"You do think I've been brave, don't you, dear?"

The look in his eyes was answer enough.

"Then you won't think I'm a coward when I ask you something that sounds as though I were afraid?"

He shook his head, smiling. "Try me and see."

"I want you to give up exhibition flying. You've often said you would, sooner or later," I urged eagerly. "Won't you please—now?"

Ovie looked troubled. "But why now?"

"It's only that—there's a very special reason why you should."

He lifted my face in his hands. "You've been crying," he charged.

"Not because I'm sorry, though," I said. "I'm the happiest girl alive. It's only that—that—"

"That what?"

"You've always said I was your only tie to earth—and I suppose one isn't enough to keep you down. But don't you think if there were another tie—"

"But there's not," he said.

"Supposing there were—would you stay down then?"

"Why then," he replied slowly, "why then—I suppose I would."

"I think there's going to be—and oh, I'd so like to go home!"

For a long moment he looked into my eyes.

"By George," he breathed, "you *have* been brave!"

THE END





1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates.



